

# **EXPLORING IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOLESCENTS WHO ATTENDED A SCHOOL OF SKILLS**

by

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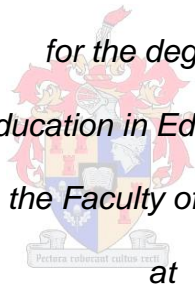
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# DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

Identity formation is a multifaceted process that has implications for how one feels about oneself and the decisions one makes about one's future. Developmental theorists have therefore become increasingly interested in the impact of contextual factors on the development of identity formation, especially the school context. The aim of this research was to explore how adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity. In order to do this, this research made use of a basic qualitative research design that is embedded within the interpretive paradigm. Participants were purposively selected and invited to take part in the study, after which four participants and their parents willingly participated. Interviews were used as the primary method of data collection along with the researcher's reflexive notes and an inductive process of qualitative thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data. The results revealed variability in responses, as individuals made meaning according to their own construction of past experiences within and outside the school context. The study showed that the participants entered the school of skills with a poor sense of self due to the lack of support and guidance and the effects of being labelled and excluded in the mainstream primary school. The results further indicate that schools of skills face severe negative public evaluation, which had a negative impact on how the participants felt about being referred to and having to attend a school of skills. However, most of the participants felt that their attendance at a school of skills had shaped their sense of identity in a positive way, as public forms of evaluation were mitigated by significant relations with teachers and a sense of belonging among their peers. Finally, although the participants feel more positive about themselves, they are concerned about their future vocational opportunities, as they feel that the school has not offered a contribution for a viable identity. The findings of this study will inform counsellors, school personnel and parents regarding identity-related issues in the school context.

## OPSOMMING

Identiteitsvorming is 'n proses met baie fasette en het baie implikasies vir hoe 'n mens oor jouself voel en hoe jy besluite oor die toekoms neem. Ontwikkelingsteoretici het dus toenemend begin belangstel in die impak van kontekstuele faktore op die ontwikkeling van identiteitsvorming, veral in die skoolkonteks. Die doel van hierdie navorsing was om ondersoek in te stel na hoe adolessente wat 'n vaardigheidskool bygewoon het hul identiteit sien. Ten einde dit te doen, is gebruik gemaak van 'n basiese kwantitatiewe ontwerp, wat interpretasie-paradigma insluit. Deelnemers is doelbewus gekies en uitgenooi om aan die studie deel te neem, en vier deelnemers en hul ouers het ingewillig om deel te neem. Onderhoude is gebruik as die primêre metode van data-insameling tesame met die navorser se besinnende aantekeninge. 'n Induktiewe proses van kwalitatiewe tema-ontleding is gebruik om die data te ontleed. 'n Verskeidenheid resultate is gevind as gevolg van individuele interpretasie van ervarings in die verlede binne en buite die skoolkonteks. Die studie toon dat deelnemers wat by 'n vaardigheidskool skoolgaan 'n swak selfbeeld het. Die studie dui verder aan dat die gebrek aan ondersteuning, leiding, etikettering en uitsluiting in die hoofstroom-laerskool 'n impak gehad het op deelnemers se lae selfbeeld. Die studie wys verder ook dat die negatiewe publieke persepsie 'n negatiewe invloed het op hoe deelnemers voel oor die verwysing na en bywoning van 'n vaardigheidskool. Tog het die meeste van die deelnemers gevoel dat hul bywoning van 'n vaardigheidskool hul sin van identiteit op 'n positiewe manier beïnvloed het. Goeie verhoudings met onderwysers en 'n gevoel van behoort onder hul eweknieë het die impak van die negatiewe persepsie versag. Hoewel die deelnemers positiewer oor hulself voel, is hulle bekommerd oor hul toekomstige beroepsgeleenthede, aangesien hulle voel dat 'n vaardigheidskool nie 'n bydrae tot 'n lewensvatbare identiteit bied nie. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie sal beraders, skoolpersoneel en ouers bewus maak van identiteitskwessies in die skoolkonteks.

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# CHAPTER 1

## CONTEXT OF AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*Who am I? What are my values and goals?*

*What is my life's purpose? What makes me different from other people?*

*Am I really the same person from one year, or decade, to the next?*

*(Schwartz, 2001, p. 7)*

Knowing who one is and developing a clear sense of identity are crucial parts of being human, and impact on many different aspects of one's life. The questions proposed by Schwartz above illustrate those fundamental aspects of self-knowledge needed to form a healthy sense of identity. Schwartz describes these aspects as forming a roadmap for human development, which ultimately gives meaning and understanding to an individual's life. Côté similarly argues that one of the main functions of identity is to provide a sense of direction and purpose to one's life (1993, as cited in Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca & Ritchie, 2012). Both of these authors based their ideas on the theories of Erikson, whom some consider the father of identity theories. Erikson (1968) believed that individuals move through life in stages, and at each stage one needs to complete certain psychosocial tasks - identity formation being one of them. According to Erikson, and many theorists who followed him, forming an identity has implications for how we feel about ourselves, and more so the decisions we make in our lives. For this reason, the study of the process of identity formation continues to be a growing field of research.

The literature shows that there are many notions of what an identity constitutes. It has been said to be a "self-structure - an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history" (Marcia, 1980, p. 32). This definition may encourage the assumption that an identity can be achieved, when in fact research has shown that it is better described as a "trial and error" or a "life-

long process" (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca & Ritchie, 2012, p. 6). Identity formation does not end when it is formed (Hoare, 2002, as cited in Sokol, 2009); instead, it should be considered as "negotiated, fluid and multiple, rather than achieved, unitary or consistent" (Faircloth, 2012, p. 187).

Erikson (1968) was the first to propose that adolescence is the primary stage where identity is formed. He put forward several stages of psychosocial development, describing each stage as a crisis or turning point, in other words, an opportunity to choose among alternatives (Marcia, 1967). He named the stage following childhood *identity versus identity confusion*. He proposed that during this phase, adolescents explore among alternatives and then finally make certain commitments or choices regarding, for example, a career direction or life partner. Erikson believed that at the end of this stage, adolescents should be able to answer the questions of 'Who am I?', 'Where do I come from?' and 'Where am I going?' In this light, identity formation is viewed as a "critical development task within the adolescent phase" (Faircloth, 2012, p. 186). Therefore, having a clear sense of identity is seen as essential, because if one does not have it, then one is likely to struggle with self-doubt. According to Mikolysi (2008) this battle with self doubt can lead to irrational thinking and lowered goals and "ultimately [lead to] poor performance behaviourally, validating [one's] negative belief system [...] and this positive or negative belief system that develops plays an important role in motivation and self-regulation" (Mikolyski, 2008, p. 2).

Adolescents therefore face considerable pressure to form a sense of who they are and to decide on a career to pursue. In addition, many researchers have found that decision making regarding one's future career is a major issue for adolescents and possibly a key aspect of identity formation (Alberts, Mbalo & Ackerman, 2003; Erikson, 1968). A substantial reason for this is that soon adolescents will be entering the job market and have to earn a livelihood (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Identity formation has also been described as a sense of "being recognized as a certain person in a given context" (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Therefore, understanding the role played by context in shaping identity can provide much insight into the process of identity formation. Gee (2000) points out that in this postmodern era, where we are encouraged to be true to ourselves, our chosen identity still needs to be recognised by others. We therefore find an "intersection between identity development and

context" (Faircloth, 2012, p. 186). Therefore, context plays a crucial role as a "site of identity work" (Faircloth, 2012, p. 187).

The study of identity formation in adolescence as well as the influence of context has therefore become increasingly relevant over the years. Recent studies in this field have shown that school image has a direct impact on learners' attitude towards learning (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006), which is related to the levels of motivation learners present with. Other researchers have found that motivation has a direct impact on shaping identity in the school context (Kaplan & Flum, 2009).

It is evident that researchers in many different contexts have come to view identity as a phenomenon worthy of investigation in the context of understanding the impact of schools on the formation of identity (Gee, 2000). However, many, if not most, studies have taken a quantitative route in studying identity formation. In Section 2.3 of the literature review to follow, it is explored how Marcia (1980) used the theoretical concepts of identity proposed by Erikson to form measurable units that many researchers following Marcia have similarly used with success. This area of literature has brought much value to the field of identity research; however, Section 2.3 also shows that contemporary researchers are encouraging identity work to acknowledge the voice of the adolescent, as identity formation is now acknowledged as a process of meaning making. The paradigm in which this study is embedded (Section 1.5.1) and theoretical framework used for this study (see Section 2.2) explains how this process of meaning making is made on an individual level, in interaction with others.

Kaplan and Flum (2012) have pointed out that research is needed to understand the nature of identity formation processes in educational settings. It was therefore the purpose of this study to provide rich descriptions of personal experiences from adolescents themselves regarding their perceptions of their identity formation. Furthermore, as school experiences are considered to be "building blocks of identity" (Kaplan & Flum, 2012, p. 172), their impact on and role in shaping identity were also considered, as few studies have endeavoured to explore the impact of social context on the process of identity formation (Danielson, Lorem & Kroger, 2002, as cited in Bergh & Erling, 2005; Stoop, 2005).

## 1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

South Africa's education system has undergone several changes over the past 18 years since becoming a democracy in 1994. One of the most fundamental changes has been an emphasis on *education for all* (Department of Education [DoE], 2001) regardless of factors such as race, culture, gender or disability. Many changes have been made, such as the fact that policies are encouraging mainstream schools to accept learners experiencing barriers to learning, be it physical, emotional or mild cognitive barriers (DoE, 2001). These policies focus on building a system of inclusion whereby the institution, the curriculum and the educator are called to adapt to the needs of the learner (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Despite policy guidelines, many learners are still being excluded from mainstream education for a variety of reasons. One particular example is that many learners are being referred from the mainstream to a school of skills. In his research, Eksteen (2009) describes how rehabilitation centres for youths in trouble with the law became schools of industry and consequently schools of skill. At present, one will find that learners are referred to a school of skills from the mainstream if they have been identified as facing unique barriers to learning or cognitive difficulties, and if it is believed that they would benefit from practical skills training rather than the mainstream academic focus of schools (South African National Association for Specialised Education [SANASE], 2010). A skill, in this context, refers to vocational skills such as catering, welding or upholstery.

The school context has been identified as a "central domain in the life of the adolescent's life experiences and sense of who they are and who they want to become" (Kaplum & Flum, 2012, p. 172). Therefore, one can argue that a school of skills is an excellent idea, as learners who are at high risk of failing and dropping out now have an opportunity to acquire a skill that will help them navigate their way into the adult world. For many learners, however, the current model does not have the presumed positive effects (Eksteen, 2009; SANASE, 2010).

Having been employed at a school of skills for a period of three years, I have personally observed how many of these learners develop a negative attitude towards the school as well as their future prospects. Many present with poor school



attendance, lack of motivation and general disrespect for property, teachers and even one another. Learners furthermore do not want to be associated with the school, therefore some would often not wear the proper school uniform or they would remove any identifying clothing before leaving the school premises - a mechanism described as "identity protection" (Epstein, 1998, p. 4). Eksteen (2009) in his study among educators at a school of skills on their feelings of competency observed similar behaviour among learners at the school of skills which he describes.

As indicated above, it is evident in the literature that school context plays a significant role in shaping identity, and as "identity [is] such a central and deep aspect of life", researchers in the field of education and developing educational practices "cannot afford to neglect it" (Kaplan & Flum, 2012, p. 244). In addition, as stated earlier, identity is not necessarily something one achieves and maintains in a fixed way. Instead, it is ever changing and is shaped by various elements such as personality, interpersonal relationships and contexts. Similarly, context is also considered an ever-changing system. Therefore, there will always be possibilities for future research within the field of identity.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Several studies have been done in South Africa and abroad to investigate the role and impact of the social context, especially schools (e.g. Dawson, 2007; Flanagan & Stout, 2012, Stoop, 2005). However, research on the particular context of a school of skills seems to be very rare. Eksteen (2009) researched the perceptions of the educators about their role and experiences at a school of skills. Kuffner (2012) researched the perceptions of adolescents regarding their learning difficulties at a special school. However, it appears that knowledge is lacking in understanding adolescents' perceptions in the specific context of a school of skills.

Epstein (1998) suggested that future research should focus on the unique challenges adolescents face in relation to identity formation, especially within their culturally defined situation. Similarly, Schwartz (2005) states that research within this area should focus more on samples of the general population, which would allow for a richer collection of data. Kaplan and Flum (2010) noted that few studies looked at the impact of school context on adolescents' identity formation, and that the few that do

have highlighted the impact of private versus public schools on self-concept, as well as coping strategies with school work. Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006) similarly investigated the impact of the school context on identity formation. Their findings suggest that adolescents' opportunities to explore and make commitments largely depend on contextual characteristics of the school, which include the socioeconomic status, school climate and social relations (discussed in Section 2.5.1.). Research on social relations in the school context, which is an important domain for exploration and commitment, has been indicated as an area that requires further exploration (Kaplan & Flum, 2010).

Education has a pivotal role to play in "promoting adaptive engagement in identity formation" (Kaplan & Flum, 2012, p. 172). Therefore, it is hoped that this study will provide an understanding of how identity is formed in the unique setting of a school of skills, as well as the effects it has on the way these learners construct the story of who they are and where they are heading. It is further hoped that this study will inform the practices of counsellors and educators who play a critical role in providing the necessary information and support to guide successful identity formation. Moreover, the study could be used to inform counsellors of areas of focus for intervention, therapy and whole-school development.

According to Marcia, "studying identity formation is educationally useful because individuals do better and feel better about themselves and others when they have it" (1980, p. 131). Gaining insight into the processes of identity formation and the experiences of adolescents can therefore assist in this endeavour.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research question that guided this study was:

***How do adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity?***

The sub-questions that were explored are:

1. How do they see themselves?
2. What experiences have shaped the way they view themselves?
3. What role do they think attending a school of skills played in shaping the way they see themselves?

## **1.5 THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

### **1.5.1 Research paradigm**

A paradigm refers to beliefs and practices about the world and how knowledge can be obtained (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research was conducted within an interpretive paradigm, which encourages one to focus on the process and lived experiences of the participants, and emphasises the value of understanding as knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, although one may enter one's research with assumptions about the type of data that one may gather, one must still keep an open mind, knowing that multiple realities are possible (Merriam, 2008).

### **1.5.2 Research design**

A basic qualitative research design was selected to guide this study, as qualitative research is embedded in the interpretive paradigm (Merriam, 2009). Compared to quantitative research, which seeks to test hypothesis and investigate relationships, qualitative research seeks to provide a rich description of experiences on a day-to-day basis (Polkinghorne, 2005). It is driven by the understanding that people construct their own reality, and that this reality is constantly shaped through their interaction with their social world (Merriam, 2009).

A qualitative design further provides a range of methods that can assist in uncovering "unknown strands and cords of meaning that children disclose when space and means are made for them to communicate" (Clark, 2011, p. 12). It focuses on the meanings, experiences and worldview of the participant (Clark, 2011). It is further cognisant of the role of context and process, as opposed to observing objects in a controlled environment (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, as cited in Clark, 2011). Qualitative research encourages rich descriptions and it esteems the process of meaning making very highly. It further acknowledges the researcher as a primary

research instrument, thereby creating a partnership of making meaning between the researcher and participant (Merriam, 2009).

Since the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding, a basic qualitative research design therefore suited the objectives of this study, which were to explore how adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceived their identity and the role played by the school of skills in shaping that sense of identity.

### **1.5.3 Selection of participants**

As the objective was to provide in-depth descriptions of perceptions of identity and school experiences, it suited the study to include a small number of participants. Participants were therefore selected using a purposive sampling method, which is characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). This form of sampling was also considered suitable as it guides the researcher in "choosing people from which the researcher can obtain a substantial amount of information about the experience being studied" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140).

During the course of the researcher's honours programme, she was placed at a school of skills for three months. After graduating, the researcher obtained a permanent post at a different school of skills for three years. During that time, she built relationships with learners whom she thought would be able to provide rich information that would contribute to this study.

Once ethical clearance to initiate the study was granted, the researcher contacted several individuals. She informed them about the aims and details of the study, and explained that participation is voluntary. The participants were given the opportunity to consider participation and discuss it with their parents. Four participants, and their parent(s), volunteered to take part in the study. These participants were presented with an informed consent form (addenda B and C), which stipulated the aims of the research, what the data will be used for, and that the data would be captured by means of a tape recorder. The researcher then set up appointments with those participants who have given their consent and interviews took place at a time and venue that were convenient for the participants and their parent(s).

In selecting the participants, the following criteria were considered: Participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 23 years old, they must have attended and completed their schooling at a school of skills, and they had to be able to engage with the researcher in providing rich descriptions of their experiences. Distinction was not made between men and women; however, two participants were male and two were female. Distinction was also not made between English and Afrikaans speakers; however, the two men were English speaking, and the two women were Afrikaans speaking.

#### **1.5.4 Data collection**

Polkinghorne points out that because people "have access to their own experiences", a study of their experiences should be in the first person, as these documents serve as "evidence of the ideas and thoughts expressed by the participants" (2005, p. 138). In addition, following a pilot study, it was decided to include the views of the participants' parents, as it was discovered that parents could offer valuable insights into the way the participants see themselves and the experiences that contributed to their identity formation. The primary method of data collection therefore involved qualitative interviewing. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts of the interviews with participants and their parents, as well as the reflexive observations and the process notes of the researcher, served as texts for data analysis.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview method. The researcher made use of an interview guide during the interview process (see Appendix D). The research questions (Section 1.4) and the literature review (Chapter 2) informed the themes and probing questions included in the interview guide. The emphasis was on collecting "rich, narrative accounts of the participants' experiences", as recommended by Etherington and Bridges (2011, p. 12).

Furthermore, in collecting data, it is not only *what* participants say that matters, but also *how* they say it. Therefore, recording information on how the participants engaged in the process was essential to this study. Fiske (1989, as cited in Mitchell, 2008) named this category of data *production texts*, which include secondary data such as the researcher's observations and process notes (Mitchell, 2008). This is especially relevant in that data collection and data analysis should not be seen as

two separate activities; instead, they should occur simultaneously throughout the process (Etherington, 2009).

### **1.5.5 Data analysis**

The transcribed interviews as well as the process notes made by the researcher served as raw data for analysis. The data were analysed and interpreted using thematic content analysis. This process involved labelling and coding every item of information so that differences and similarities become evident (Hancock, 1998, p. 16). Thereafter, the researcher engaged in a "procedure of categorization of the verbal data for the purpose of classification, summarisation and tabulation", as recommended by Hancock (1998, p. 17). The researcher then looked for themes and patterns that contributed to understanding how the participants in the study perceive their identity and the role the school of skills played in shaping their sense of identity.

## **1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The participants chosen for this study were adolescents who have completed their schooling at a school of skills; therefore, they were aged 18 and above, although still in the adolescent phase of development. The participants were therefore eligible to give their own consent, and the consent of their parents was not mandatory. However, as indicated in Chapter 3, the parents' contributions to the study were invaluable as an additional source of information and served as data verification. The parents were therefore requested and encouraged to be part of the process and offer their contributions.

The purpose of the research project was thoroughly explained to the participants in a language that they understood. Although the consent forms and interview guide were created in English, the researcher felt competent to explain the content in a manner that the participants would understand. Once it was clear that the participants understood, the researcher proceeded to the interviewing phase. It was further emphasised that the participants were free to refuse to answer any questions they found discomforting or to participate in the study at any time.

Allan (2008) further emphasises that in maintaining confidentiality, steps should be taken to ensure that participants cannot be identified. Therefore, pseudonyms were used for the participants throughout the study. No identifying details were included in the study. Moreover, data collected from the interviews were used only for the purpose of this research. Data were further stored in a locked cabinet, and data stored on the researcher's computer were protected by a security code. After the research study was completed, the data were sealed and stored in a locked location.

## **1.7 KEY TERMS**

### **1.7.1 Identity**

Identity is a multifaceted phenomenon. As a result, there is not one clear definition of what an identity is. However, many researchers agree that identity elements generally include aspects such as race, ethnicity, culture and even physical appearance (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles, 2011). Schwartz et al. (2011, p. 4) proposed an operational definition of identity comprising of one's "chosen commitments, personal characteristics, beliefs about oneself, roles and position in relation to others, membership in social groups and categories, treasured material possessions and where one belongs in a geographical space".

### **1.7.2 Identity formation**

Yamakawa, Forman and Ansell (2005) point out that there seems to be two notable definitions for identity: firstly, it is the way one is recognised by others as a certain kind of person, and secondly, it is the stories one tells and the way in which one tells these stories, or in other words, how one represents the parts of oneself that are deemed personally significant. These definitions are in line with the purpose of this study, which aimed to explore how the participants view themselves and how they perceive others' views of them, as well as the role of context in shaping their sense of identity.

### **1.7.3 Adolescence**

Learners that attend primary school are often referred to as children, while those attending high school are often referred to as adolescents. The participants in this study are likely to be at the starting point of their transition from adolescence to adulthood, said to be between the ages of 16 and 23 years old. The reason that emphasis is placed on the term 'adolescence' in this study is because it is a critical period for the formation of an identity (Erikson, 1968). Even though identity development is said to be a lifelong journey, the experiences in adolescence sometimes have a lifelong effect on one's identity.

### **1.7.4 School of skills**

Learners that attend primary school are often referred to as children, while those attending high school are often referred to as adolescents. The participants in this study are likely to be at the starting point of their transition from adolescence to adulthood, said to be between the ages of 16 and 23 years old. The reason that emphasis is placed on the term 'adolescence' in this study is because it is a critical period for the formation of an identity (Erikson, 1968). Even though identity development is said to be a lifelong journey, the experiences in adolescence sometimes have a lifelong effect on one's identity.

## **1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION**

A brief outline of the research study is as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the phenomenon of identity formation and indicates a gap in the research regarding the role that schools of skills have in shaping adolescent identity formation. It further offers a discussion of the background and objectives for the study, as well as the research process and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on paradigms and discourses regarding identity formation, adolescence and the role of context, in this case a special needs institution known as a school of skills.



Chapter 3 presents the research design, methodology, data-collection procedures and the data-analysis process.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings in terms of themes identified from the data, as well as a discussion of these findings.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings, strengths and limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and future research.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter was to contextualise the study so as to familiarise the reader with the research conducted. It further identified the gap in the research and motivated its relevance to the field of education and educational psychology. The chapter further provided a brief description of the research process and the steps taken to select the participants and achieve the research objectives. In the next chapter, a detailed review of the literature relevant to gaining insight into the process of identity formation and the impact of the school context in shaping identity is provided.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity formation and the role the school of skills played in shaping their sense of identity. Research has shown that identity formation has implications for how we think and feel about ourselves (Stoop, 2005), the choices that we make (Kroger, 2007) and the actions we take towards our future aspirations (Côté & Levine, 2002). In order to gain insight into the experiences that shape identity formation in adolescence within the school context, this chapter presents a conceptualisation of identity formation, how it occurs in the adolescent phase and the role of the school context. In addition, as the school of skills, classified as a special school, faces a stigma that has implications for the formation of a healthy sense of identity (Eksteen, 2009; SANASE, 2010), the literature review also focuses on the development of special education in South Africa to understand the context of the school of skills, and how the school climate can impact on identity formation in the adolescent phase.

Identity formation is an intricate and multifaceted process, which makes it a complex phenomenon to study (Schwartz et al., 2011). It is simultaneously an essential component of human development and therefore has critical implications for the field of educational psychology. This research is in line with the understanding that identity formation is a developmental process, and therefore can occur throughout one's lifetime. Developmental theories that inform this research firstly argue that development occurs within embedded systems, of which one is the school system, where the developing individual stands at the centre (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These development theories further maintain that development occurs at different stages at which an individual is to complete certain psychological and social tasks, and that the task of identity formation is salient to the adolescent phase (Erikson, 1968).

Both theories give importance to the role of contextual factors and individual factors in human development. The implication that exists is that an investigation into a developmental process such as identity formation requires an analysis of person and context and the impact they have on each other. This approach is being used more often in contemporary literature as a more realistic approach to understanding identity formation (Faircloth, 2012). In this study, the focus was on the unique setting of a school of skills as a context and embedded system that affects and is affected by the developing individual.

## **2.2 BIO-ECOLOGICAL THEORY: PERSON-PROCESS-CONTEXT-TIME**

The ecological systems model of human development provides a framework that one can use to bring insight into the impact of the school context on development, especially the development of a healthy sense of identity. The first assumption of this theory is that "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving biopsychological human and persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 572). Therefore, to understand a developmental process such as identity formation, one needs to take into consideration how these elements interact with one another and shape one's sense of self (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Bronfenbrenner described the ecological systems theory as a "nested arrangement of concentric structures" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22), namely the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. He proposed that these structures form part of the environment that has an impact on an individual's development, and that this environment includes structures that involve direct and indirect influences that have the power to give meaning to certain situations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He later added the chronosystem as delegating the importance of time for development, as well as the essential component of individual differences in biology and personality. The theory, visually depicted in Figure 2.1 below, was therefore renamed the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

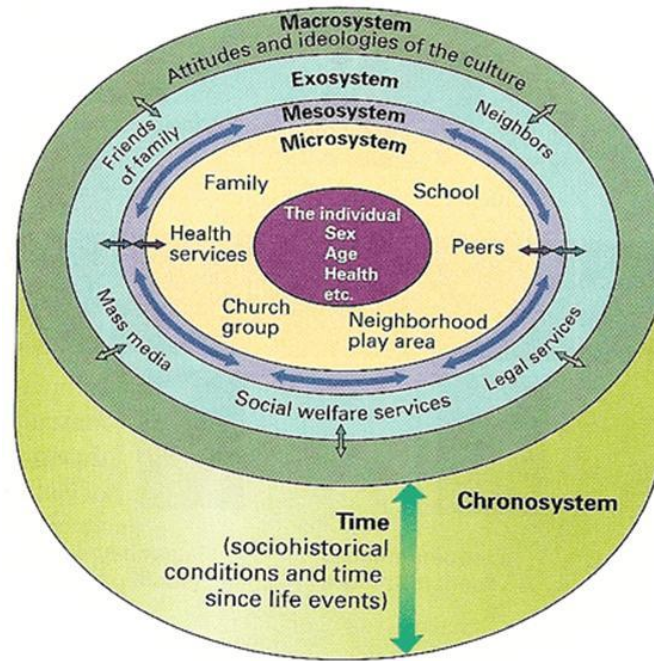


Figure 2.1: The bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)

### 2.2.1 The microsystem

The *microsystem* is defined as the "pattern of activities, roles, interpersonal relations and experiences by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). It therefore constitutes the daily face-to-face interactions that one may experience with people and objects in one's everyday life. Bronfenbrenner pointed out that the critical term in this definition is that of *experience*. It is perhaps for this reason that he extended his theory to understanding the nature of these experiences more fully, which he named *proximal processes*. The understanding of the microsystem guides this study in viewing the participant as an individual with unique characteristics, influenced by biology, as well as the different contexts the individual interacts with. This study highlights the activities, roles, interpersonal relations and experiences that the participants experienced as meaningful to their sense of identity, in the context of a school of skills.

### 2.2.2 The mesosystem

The *mesosystem* is defined as the "system of microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). In this layer of the embedded structures, systems actively interact with one

another. The school, said to be "the primary social context where adolescents come together" (Stoop, 2005, p. 43), can be seen in this way. Face-to-face interactions continuously occur between learners, educators and learners, and among educators. Meeus and Dekovic pointed out that peers often turn to one another for advice, as opposed to their parents (1995, as cited in Stoop, 2005). As a result, the relationships fostered between peers are "essential components of adolescent identity development" (Stoop, 2005, p. 43). This study therefore focused on the individuals' perceptions of their experiences that have taken place in the mesosystem; experiences which they deem meaningful in terms of the way in which they perceive their identity.

### **2.2.3 The exosystem**

The *exosystem* does not have a direct impact on the developing person, although "events occur that affect or are affected by what happens in the setting" of which the developing person is a part (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). In this case, one would refer to the influence that a parent's workplace can have on a family, or the nature of staff relations in a school setting and the impact on individual learners. Therefore, in exploring the impact that context has on individual development, a researcher is to understand that "processes operating in different settings are not independent of each other" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723). This study focused on the perceptions and meaning adolescents have ascribed to their experiences, yet as this perspective points out, there are many factors that may influence adolescents' perceptions of their experiences, although not directly.

### **2.2.4 The macrosystem**

The *macrosystem* "refers to consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, exosystems)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). Bronfenbrenner refers to these consistencies as "patterns of differentiation" (1979, p. 26), such as one's culture, religious beliefs, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and even lifestyle. In terms of identity formation, the above aspects form part of a core identity. In addition, in the context of schools, another element one could see as consistent is that of education policies and government laws. The development of worldviews and policies in South Africa is explored in Section 2.6. The evidence

clearly indicates that policies often offer different experiences depending on how, and if, they are implemented. As a system in which the developing individual is nested, the macrosystem too has an impact on the formation of identity.

### **2.2.5 The chronosystem**

The *chronosystem* involves "change or consistency over time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). These changes or consistencies can occur in the individual or in the environment. Development occurs over time, and so do the experiences of past, present and future. Bronfenbrenner noted that "the developmental outcomes at one age become the person characteristics that influence development at a later age" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 635). Erikson (1968) also questioned the nature of identity formation as a developmental aspect that could be achieved and could remain stable over time, or as something that changes as development continued. Researchers have since established that parts of one's identity may remain stable, while other parts change. In addition, adolescents are growing up in an age where the latest media trends may have an impact on their sense of identity. Therefore, although it was the focus of this study to explore the role that a school of skills may have played in forming adolescents' perceptions of their identity, it is important to remember that many other factors may have a direct or indirect impact on how identity is formed.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) further emphasised that in order to understand identity formation (which is part of human development), one should consider four interacting dimensions that occur within and between the embedded systems. These include proximal processes, person characteristics, systems and time, also known as the PPCT model - the process-person-context-time model. These factors change over time due to an individual's maturation as well as changes in the social context (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010).

### **2.2.6 Proximal processes**

Proximal processes are the face-to-face, direct interactions that take place on a regular basis (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These processes can exert significant influences, but in order "to be effective, these proximal processes must occur with regularity over extended periods of time" (Swart & Pettipher, 2011, p. 11). In addition,

the individual, the environment and the developmental outcome need to function together (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The role of proximal processes is therefore central in a psychological process such as identity formation.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) essentially pointed out that for development to occur, the person must interact with his or her environment. Proximal processes are said to "lead to particular kinds of developmental outcomes as well as have the power for actualising genetic potential for effective functioning" (Swart & Pettipher, 2011, p. 12). Equally significant are the unique characteristics of the person and the context in producing these developmental outcomes (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). We can therefore say that proximal processes can predict how identity will be formed. Negative experiences are likely to have an adverse affect, while positive experiences are likely to have positive outcomes.

### **2.2.7 Person characteristics**

Person characteristics have the ability to manipulate the course and influence of proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) identified three types of characteristics, which are discussed below.

#### ***Dispositions***

Dispositions are those characteristics that mobilise, sustain and interfere with or limit proximal processes (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). An individual with a high level of motivation can direct which interactions will determine his or her sense of identity. Similarly, an individual that struggles with a low self-esteem may lack this same ability and allow any interaction, positive or negative, to have an influence on his or her sense of identity.

#### ***Ecological resources***

Ecological resources refer to those characteristics that have an impact on the manner in which an individual engages with these proximal processes (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). These are often not directly visible and may include mental and emotional resources such as past experiences, intellectual ability and skills. In



addition, ecological resources can also include material resources such as access to housing, education and caring parents.

### ***Demand characteristics***

Demand characteristics, such as age, gender or physical appearance, often act as a personal stimulus that sets processes in motion. According to Swart and Pettipher (2011, p. 12), these characteristics can also hinder one's interactions with the social environment, and "either foster or disrupt psychological processes".

The bio-ecological theory therefore encourages researchers to investigate the nature and power of proximal processes and the kinds of development outcomes they foster, as well as the person and environment characteristics that have an impact on development outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), such as identity formation. The process of identity formation can therefore be understood within the developmental perspective of occurring within and because of person, process, context and time. Investigating the impact of individuals' school experience therefore requires consideration of person factors, as these often determine how one makes meaning of a situation, as well as context factors with which one interacts.

## **2.3 IDENTITY**

Evidence shows that the meaning of identity is in fact not a simple one. Several conceptual frameworks have been used to explain and understand the workings of identity in a variety of fields. There are aspects of one's identity considered to be unchanging; aspects said to be the core of one's identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age and physical appearance (Weigert & Gecas, 2005). On the other hand, other domains of identity are more flexible and can change as events or the individual changes. Researchers have therefore been interested in understanding the processes, levels and components of change and stability in identity formation (Adams & Marshal, 1996; Côté & Levine, 2002; Kaplan & Flum, 2009; Vryan, Adler & Addler 2003).

Of interest in this review are the fields of psychology (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Schwartz et al., 2011) and education (see Faircloth, 2012; Kaplan & Flum, 2012;



Schachter & Rich, 2012), especially the interaction between identity formation as a developmental processes and the school context.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Marcia's identity status theory can be considered foundational theories, while newer theories are often based on these foundational conceptions. In order to gain an understanding of the multiple dimensions of identity, a short review of identity definitions is provided.

### **2.3.1 Development of definitions of identity**

Theories provide a basis for reaching greater understanding of a phenomenon and integrating information into unified explanations, for example theories of human development, identity, social identity and so forth. Theories are an "organised set of ideas" (Louw & Kail, 2007, p. 13) that provide the answers to the *how* and *why* questions that surround these phenomena.

Modern-day conceptualisations of identity formation appear to be primarily based on the early theories of Erikson and Marcia. Erikson's theory, known as the psychosocial theory, focused on the individual mental functions of forming an integrated sense of identity.

#### **2.3.1.1 Erikson's psychosocial theory**

Erik Erikson founded the psychosocial theory of human development. He proposed several stages of development that humans pass through as they grow older. He further indicated several tasks that need to be completed at each stage, and once completed, allow one to move on to the next stage. Erikson assigned the task of identity formation to the adolescent period of development. During this phase, individuals tend to move away from dependence on their parents to explore the world, and often spend more time in the company of peers (Côté & Levine, 2002; Kroger, 2007).

Erikson recognised that there is "interplay between the individual biology, psychology and social recognition and response within historical context" (Kroger 2007, p. 206). He proposed that as one grows up from childhood to adulthood to the grave, one will encounter several stages, which he named points of 'crisis'. This does not refer to

literal crises, but rather to turning points in one's life. Erikson established eight stages of human development, as depicted in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1: Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development  
(Adapted from Louw & Kail, 2007, p. 20)**

Psychosocial stage	Age	Challenge
Basic trust versus mistrust	Birth to one year	To develop a sense that the world is a safe and a good place
Autonomy versus shame and doubt	1 to 3 years	To realise that one is an independent person who can make decisions
Initiative versus guilt	3 to 6 years	To develop a willingness to try new things and to handle failure
Industry versus inferiority	6 years to adolescence	To learn basic skills and to work with others
Identity versus identity confusion	Adolescence	To develop a lasting, integrated sense of self
Intimacy versus isolation	Young adulthood	To commit to another in a loving relationship
Generativity versus stagnation	Middle adulthood	To contribute to younger people, through childrearing, childcare or other productive work
Integrity versus despair	Later life	To view one's life as satisfactory and worth living

According to Erikson, the process of identity formation can be tracked through all the stages of development. One of the first identity-related transactions occurs during infancy when babies recognise and learn to trust their mother or caregiver. Similarly, during the autonomy stage, toddlers develop a sense of courage and willpower as they reach their developmental milestones. In the initiative phase, children bring a sense of purpose to their identity as they exercise curiosity through asking questions and exploring their environment. In the industry stage, school-age children are said to build a foundation for a sense of duty in life. This relates to an inherent need to be good at least one thing in life (Erikson, 1968). In addition, children want to attach

themselves to parents and teachers whom they can watch and imitate (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson argued that each stage, once achieved, prepares the foundation of the stage to follow (Louw & Kail, 2007). Louw and Kail (2007) further provided the example that adolescents who do not develop a clear sense of identity are likely to depend on their partner in a romantic relationship, believing perhaps that their identity depends on them being together.

Erikson demarcated adolescence as the period for identity formation because it is often during this period that one makes decisions that direct the rest of one's life. According to La Guardia (2009), Erikson believed that identity formation is central to the adolescent phase, and that it can be achieved in the form of "a coherent sense of one's roles and occupational pathway, one's self in relation to others, and one's values and purpose in life, whereas failure resulted in confusion within these self aspects" (La Guardia, 2009, p. 91). The adolescent is therefore seen as an active agent and as intimately involved in exploring and making identity commitments. Yet, as others have argued (Côté & Levine, 2002; Kroger, 2007), it is not expected that the adolescent will achieve a finalised product of identity. Instead, one realises that forming an identity is often salient to the context and meaning attached to people, places and experiences, and that this meaning making can continue into adulthood, even old age. A person may therefore face identity confusion when roles change or social context changes.

Erikson therefore described adolescent identity formation as a process that takes place over and within a particular time and place, be it historical, cultural or sociological (Oyserman & James, 2011). He emphasised that identity is not a private project, because it concerns "a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (Erikson, 1968, p. 122, as cited in Watzlawik & Born, 2007, p. 25). This statement makes it clear how relevant the role of culture is, especially in the South African context, which has a wealth of diverse and culturally rich contexts. The social and cultural are said to play a central role in identity formation, as changes in society have "consequences at the level of identity development" (Watzlawik & Born, 2007, p. 25). At the same time, one's identity may

only be seen as personally resonant when it is recognised by others (Erikson, 1968, as cited in Kroger, 2007).

Erikson's concept of identity seemingly involved psychodynamic processes that worked towards creating a sound, unified sense of self. Researchers that accept this understanding of identity therefore seek to disclose the processes or obstacles that lead to achieving an integrated, enduring and consistent sense of self (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Yet some have questioned whether an integrated, consistent identity is a realistic idea in a world that is constantly changing and where so many options are available. For this reason, Erikson's theory has been criticised for focusing more on the psychological aspects of identity than the influence of the social context (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). In addition, in a context such as South Africa where history and culture fulfil prominent roles, one can agree that the role of these aspects cannot be ignored, and that a view of multiple perceptions of reality is a more practical route of understanding identity formation.

Erikson's work on the human development perspective of identity formation was followed by the works of Marcia, who sought to empirically investigate the nature and extent of an achieved or non-achieved identity.

### **2.3.1.2 Marcia's identity statuses**

Marcia (1980) proposed four identity statuses that evolve based on the individual's level of commitment and rate of exploration in interacting with alternative identity statuses. These statuses are *identity achieved*, *foreclosed identity*, *moratorium* and *diffused identity*. The status of *identity achieved* refers to those who have "explored many possibilities" and then made a decision on those aspects of their identity that they will commit to (Kroger, 2007, p. 207). The status of *foreclosed identity* refers to those who have made a commitment without really having explored other possibilities (Kroger, 2007). This is often the case in children who choose to study what their parents have chosen for them. The status of *moratorium* refers to those who are still exploring and have made no commitments as yet (Kroger, 2007). The status of *diffused identity* refers to those who are neither exploring nor committing because they lack motivation, or appear disinterested in doing so (Kroger, 2007).

Marcia's statuses served as elements of identity that could be measured. As a result, Marcia (1980, p. 557) found that individuals are considered having achieved an identity if they were able to "persevere even when confronted with problems, maintain realistic levels of aspiration, didn't give in to values forced on them and were less vulnerable to negative information". In addition, in individuals with foreclosed identity, he found that their "self-esteem was vulnerable to negative information" (Marcia, 1980, p. 557).

### **2.3.1.3 Neo-Eriksonian theories**

Research following Marcia's work similarly focused on quantitative studies that could measure and generalise results for larger populations. Neo-Eriksonian theories, described as alternative approaches to the works of Erikson (Schwartz, 2001), focused on understanding identity formation in a variety of contexts - education being a critical area for development (e.g. Côté & Levine, 2002; Grotevant, 1987; Penuel & Wertsh, 1995; Schachter & Rich, 2012). Theories and research on identity formation and how it evolves in the period of adolescence as well as throughout human life continue to raise questions that seek phenomenological insight into human development (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca & Ritchie, 2013).

According to Schachter and Rich (2012), neo-Eriksonian theorists, in their attempt to find scientific theories that can be generalised to larger populations, have been criticised for placing too much emphasis on the individual. Questions therefore arise regarding the "social, cultural, [and] historical resources that empower, constrain, shape and maintain identity formation" (Schachter & Rich, 2012, p. 219). Many educational researchers have taken up this endeavour, by investigating the relationship between identity and learning (Faircloth, 2006, 2009, 2011), identity and school experiences (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006), as well as the effects of school on identity formation (McLeod & Yates, 2006).

Other researchers such as Gee (2001), Kaplan and Flum (2009), McLeod and Yates (2006) and Schachter and Rich (2012) sought to "*highlight the special promise* that understanding educational phenomenon can lead to better understanding of identity and its development" (Schachter & Rich, 2011, p. 219). Understanding the process of identity and the factors that have an impact on its formation has implications for

education, especially because individuals spend a large part of their lives at schools. Schools therefore have a role to play in promoting and engendering identity formation (Schachter & Rich, 2011).

#### **2.3.1.4 Identity today**

Wetherell and Mohanty (2010, p. 4) state that "contemporary research on identity continues to have the same compelling connections with questions on how to live and how to act". Issues of inequality, rights, social justice, social division, marginalisation, exclusion and inclusion continue to have deep roots in the understanding of identity (Wetherell & Mohanty, 2010). This study similarly looks at adolescents marginalised from the mainstream and the impact this has on their sense of identity.

A narrative approach to investigating identity has developed in more recent times. It has been described as the internalised *storied reconstruction* of one's perceptions of the past and the future towards building a sense of *unity* and *purpose* for one's life (McAdams & Cox, 2010). Stories can also be described as conversations people have about their lives, and the way they talk about themselves. According to Stoop (2005), people talk about aspects and events that are personally significant to them. These parts are then formed into a pattern that tells a story, and the way in which this story is told determines the development of an identity. Therefore, in contrast to neo-Eriksonian approaches that sought to investigate the product of identity formation, narrative approaches seek to understand the process of identity formation (e.g. McAdams & Cox, 2010; Mclean, 2003; Mclean & Pasupathi 2012; Mclean & Thorne, 2003; Weeks & Pasupathi, 2010).

McAdams and Cox (2010, p. 20) argue that "important experiences act as clues to the development of a narrative identity". These stories have the power to structure our decisions in terms of who we are and who we want to become. Resnick states that "the power of stories is that they not only speak of the people about whom they are written, but of the people who are listening to them, and the people who wrote them" (2011, as cited in McAdams & Knox, 2010, p. 20). The dominant story is also an internalised version of all the different possibilities, and this links to identity

formation being an active process whereby individuals develop an understanding of "who they were, are and will be" (McAdams & Knox, 2010, p. 20).

Mclean and Thorne (2003) investigated the impact of self-defining memories on the process of identity formation. They found that significant events or relationships have "powerful meaning making and self-defining functions" (p. 115). The research further showed that parents act as the audience to the process of meaning making when the adolescent is young and peers act as the audience when the adolescent is older (Mclean, 2005). Weeks and Pasupathi (2010) similarly found that supportive conversations with parents or peers enhance identity formation in the adolescent phase.

#### **2.3.1.5 Identity as a process**

Louw and Kail (2007, p. 8) describe *identity* as "the way a person identifies him or herself in relation to other individuals and social groups" and maintain that "the development of a child's identity is important because it will give him- or herself confidence to know who he or she really is". Identity in this respect is seen as part of human development, development of a unique personality and self-awareness. Erikson regarded identity formation as a task that needs to be completed, specifically during the age of adolescence. Currently, the idea that identity is a static process has been discarded, and instead it is seen as a *process* (Kroger, 2007), an action, that occurs throughout one's lifespan, and at different, if not all, stages in one's life. Kroger (2007, p. 207) further explains that it is an "ability to synthesize and integrate important information [...] into a new form, uniquely one's own". This makes identity a difficult concept to study, as it cannot be clearly defined (Schwartz et al., 2011).

Schwartz et al. (2011, p. 2) describe identity as the "explicit or implicit responses to the question: Who am I?" According to these authors, it also comprises of "who we think we are but also who we act as being" (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 2), be it on an individual, relational or collective level. Individual identity includes the goals, values and beliefs one has (Marcia, 1966; Waterman, 1999, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2011). Relational identity is that which identifies one as part of a group, for example a racial or cultural group. Collective identity is partner to the *feelings, beliefs and attitudes* that result in identifying with a particular group. A fourth type of identity

Schwartz et al. (2011) refer to is that of *material identity*, which is based on what we own.

In their review of research, Schwartz et al. (2011, p. 4) proposed an operational definition of identity comprising of one's "chosen commitments, personal characteristics, beliefs about oneself, roles and position in relation to others, membership in social groups and categories, treasured material possessions and where one belongs in a geographical space". Although all of these elements are likely to contribute to one's identity, Wetherell and Monhanty (2010) contend that it is the meaning and interpretation that one chooses and accepts, as part of who one is that becomes your *true* self. One's identity can therefore be described as the story one tells about one's life (McAdams & Cox, 2010), or rather, the version of the story that one chooses to tell.

The definition of identity formation that guided this research draws from the above operational definition in understanding identity as an individual task as well as an interactional activity. This study explored how the participants perceive their sense of identity in terms of how they feel about themselves, their beliefs about themselves, their perceived roles, and how they think others view them. Forming the best possible sense of identity therefore requires an active exploration of possibilities and a decision to commit to certain values, goals and activities that will sustain how you see yourself and who others confirm you to be (La Guardia, 2009). Therefore, how adolescents perceive and feel about their future prospects were also explored, as it gives an indication of adolescents' sense of identity and the meaning they have made from their experiences at a school of skills.

La Guardia (2009) emphasizes that there is a gap in understanding the mechanisms of the social context in developing and maintaining identity formation over time. He argues that it is important to understand the "person and social-contextual factors that contribute to optimizing exploration and commitment ... [and] to understand healthy identity formation and maintenance" (La Guardia 2009, p. 92). In Section 3.6 it will be discussed that one of the limitations of this study is that it does not explore identity formation over time, however adolescence has been said to be the starting point when individuals integrate their sense of self, therefore it is hoped that exploring their perceptions can inform those who work with youths to promote and engender



healthy identity formation among the youth. To further understand how identity formation occurs, a conceptual understanding of the adolescent phase and the way in which identity formation occurs in the adolescent phase is needed.

## 2.4 ADOLESCENCE

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) defines 'adolescence' as the period of transition (referred to as a bridge by Louw, Louw & Ferns [2007]) between childhood and adulthood, ranging from the ages of 10 to 19. Universally, adolescence is seen as the onset of biological factors such as puberty; however, "the duration and defining characteristics of this period may vary across time, cultures and socioeconomic situations" (WHO, 2013). Therefore, making a clear distinction between the starting point and end point of adolescence is quite a challenge (Kroger, 2007; Louw et al., 2007).

In South Africa, the legal age of adulthood has been set at 18 years old, although new legislation has taken into consideration that adolescents are maturing at a younger age. As a result, youths as young as 12 may now consent to medical treatment, termination of pregnancy, HIV testing and even psychological services (Strode, Slack & Essack, 2010). According to Thom (2010), new legislation does however indicate that a certain amount of maturity and an understanding of the situation must be present.

The exact time at which adolescence ends has also contributed to a thriving debate. In present times, adult-related choices appear to be occurring later in life. Those who have the opportunity are studying further and are getting married much later, and in terms of Marcia's statuses, it appears that many youths today spend more time exploring (moratorium status), less time committing, and often changing commitments on a regular basis (Côté & Levine, 2002). Adolescence has therefore been extended to a period called late adolescence or *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

Arnett (2010) describes emerging adulthood as a time of exploring possibilities, a time when youths may experience instability and a feeling of being in-between worlds, and a period of focusing on the self. Arnett (2004, 2010) proposes that

emerging adulthood should be seen as a distinct developmental stage, ranging from the ages of 18 to 25. Arnett further argues that identity formation actually occurs in this period, as exploration and commitment occur much later (Arnett, 2010; McAdams & Knox, 2010). Age is therefore an unreliable source in demarcating adolescence. Louw et al. (2007) suggest that it would be more useful to define adolescence in terms of *physical, psychological* and *socio-cultural norms*. These norms can include being able to support oneself, independence from parents and fulfilling adult roles such as seeking employment or further education (Louw et al., 2007). Adolescence is therefore often characterized as being a stormy and stressful period for adolescents (Wild & Swartz, 2012), "marked by identity struggle and confusion" (Soudien, 2011, p. 24).

Part of the storm for adolescents is the need to become independent. Establishing a sense of identity and deciding on a career become imperative for adolescents, as not making these choices can likely result in them not being regarded as assets to their community (Murugami, 2009). Gaining insight into how youths see themselves and think about their futures is therefore critical to the field of education (Steyn, Badenhorst & Kamper, 2010). In their study, Steyn et al. (2010) investigated the perspectives of adolescents about their future. They found that adolescents are generally positive, and even though many of them still live in difficult circumstances, they are hopeful that things will change. However, Steyn et al. (2010, p. 185) point out that the education system is failing adolescents by not capitalising on this "fertile soil" and assisting adolescents to realise their dreams. One can therefore agree with Steyn et al. (2010) that taking the voice of adolescents into account can assist educationalists and other relevant parties to become active in their development.

#### **2.4.1 Identity formation in adolescence**

The adolescent phase of development is often marked by a growing awareness of identity issues (Stoop, 2005). Some of the concerns that are relevant to adolescents include gender roles, relationships, marriage, religion, politics, an own value system, independence from parents, social responsibility and work roles (Louw et al., 2007). Rooted in these concerns is the need for adolescents to be able to define "who they are, what is important to them and [what the directions are] that they want to take in life" (Louw et al., p. 309).

Erikson therefore described the psychosocial task of identity formation as a crisis, or a turning point: "[A] temporary period of confusion, during which adolescents explore, question existing values and experiment with alternative roles in order to develop an own set of values and goals" (1968, as cited in Louw et al., 2007, p. 309). In addition, Wild and Swartz (2012) have identified the following six factors that also affect identity formation in adolescence:

- Cognitive skills
- Personality
- Relationships with parents and peers
- Opportunities to explore
- Cultural and
- Economic context.

It should be noted that these aspects do not follow a particular order of influence; instead, they are continuously re-evaluated, differentiations are made, and the individual then chooses which parts will be integrated into his or her sense of self and which will not (Wild & Swartz, 2012). It can therefore be seen as a "continuous interplay between the psychological interior of the individual and his/her socio-cultural context" (Stoop 2005, p. 33). Contemporary notions of identity formation therefore consider it a process of transformation that occurs regularly and sometimes often during one's life time. An individual therefore forms a sense of identity based on past, present and future expectations of the self. Kaplan and Flum (2012) stated that experiences "carry pivotal meaning in people's lives [...] because adolescents are developing cognitive capacity, which it turn, elevates self-reflection ability, and develops in tandem with identity" (p. 241).

The literature shows that parenting and identity are significantly interlinked (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Crocetti, Rubini & Meeus, 2008; Smits, Soenens, Luyckx, Berzonsky & Goossens, 2008). Research has shown that parents can help or hinder the process of identity formation by means of their childrearing behaviours (Romano, 2004). Primary areas of interest have been the impact of attachment and separation anxiety and the degree of identity achievement, rather than the process of identity

formation. Researchers have found that behaviours that facilitate identity formation include warmth, companionship, acceptance, reasonable expectations, encouragement of self-expression and an authoritative, yet loving, discipline style (Romano, 2004). On the other hand, behaviours that inhibit identity formation include hostility, restrictiveness, emotional distance, perceived rejection and rigidity (Romano, 2004). According to Steinberg (2001, cited in Romano, 2004, p. 25), "effective parenting transcends the home environment and allows for identity achievement in contexts outside of the family system, such as the school". Beyers and Goossens (2008) similarly found that a secure parent-child relationship, independence training and the encouragement of autonomy lead to a healthy sense of identity. Smits et al. (2008) noted that family systems theory and attachment theory point out how the quality of parents' childrearing styles contributed to identity exploration and a positive sense of self.

The literature further shows that peers have an increasing impact on adolescent identity formation as adolescents move towards becoming independent from their parents and begin to spend more time with their peers (Arnett, 2004; Davis, 2012; Kroger 2007). Arnett (2004) discusses several identity markers that act as shared norms among peers. These may include clothing styles and music preferences. These shared interests revolve around shared interests and values that encourage a sense of belonging among peers. A sense of belonging is said to be important because of its value in developing a sense of self in interaction with others and in relation to others (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Davis (2012) emphasises that the researchers need to take digital media into consideration, as these have become integral to adolescents' lives. Davis (2012) examined the impact of online communication on peer interaction and identity formation and found that online communication encouraged a sense of belonging and created opportunities for self-disclosure, especially because of its nature to maintain a constant sense of connection.

Adolescents are therefore faced with many alternatives, especially in this era with the impact of globalisation (Bornman, 2003; Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011). Bornman (2003) characterises globalisation as a time of rapid changes, a strong movement towards individualism and the collapse of a sense of community. He further points

out that individuals now have the freedom to choose who they want to be and what they want to do in life; however, with this freedom comes the responsibility and pressure of doing so. Adolescents are further pressurised because society tends to label them (Epstein, 1998). This is done through the use of the media's portrayal of popular culture, which according to Soudien (2011) plays an important role in shaping identity formation. Wild and Swartz (2012) similarly point out that identity seems to have taken on connotations of a fashionable 'must-have', considering that music, friends, pop stars and brand names have become major influencing factors on the adolescent's journey to find balance or a healthy sense of self. One can therefore agree that "in the age of globalization consumption and commodities have become important ways in which individuals acquire and express their identity" (Bornman, 2003, p. 29).

The literature therefore emphasises that identity is to a great extent social in nature, and that changes that occur in society or any context one is a part of can and will shape developmental outcomes such as identity formation (Dowling, 2011; Jones & Deutsch, 2013). Denzin encourages individuals to take a relational view of identity, and to understand the context of relationships in which adolescents take part on a daily basis (1989, as cited in Jones & Deutsch, 2013). The influence of interactions with parents and peers on identity formation has therefore received much attention in the literature.

Adolescents spend much of their time at schools (Stoop, 2005), and issues of identity and understanding the self have long been areas of interest (Côté & Levine, 2002; Kroger, 2007). As a result, understanding the role that educational phenomena play in the formation of adolescent identity has become an area of great interest (see Faircloth, 2009, 2011; Gee, 2000; Flum & Kaplan, 2006; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; McLeod & Yates, 2006; Schachter & Rich, 2012). Schachter and Rich (2012) point out that researchers should earnestly endeavour to increase the body of knowledge that seeks to inform what schools can and should do to enhance identity development. It was therefore the aim of this research to follow suit and similarly look at the point of interaction between identity and education (Kaplan & Flum, 2009, 2012; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; Schachter & Rich, 2011).

Davidson (1996) and Delpit (1995) point out that school life and the quality of interactions between all members in a school context affect the formation of an identity (as cited in Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Similarly, it was found that when a school has a culture of learning, when learning material is relevant and meaningful, and when identity-related issues are part and parcel of the curriculum, individuals are likely to form a school-related sense of self (Faircloth, 2012). In these contexts, individuals are given the opportunity to engage in identity-exploring activities with the guidance of educators who are invested in their identity formation. Including identity-related activities into the classroom environment has also been positively related to an increase in motivation and learning at schools (see Sinai, Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

Identity formation has therefore been shown to be a product of relational processes (Bosma & Kunnen, 2008; Ford & Lerner, 1992). The context in which these processes occur, specifically the school context, is therefore of interest in this research.

#### **2.4.2 Identity agents**

Schachter and Ventura (2008) were interested in identity-related processes occurring between the individual and the context. In their 2008 study, they investigated the impact of parents as partners in identity formation, or, as Schachter formally named them, identity agents. Identity agents are those who are "actively involved with identity work and the youth" (Schachter & Ventura, 2008, p. 454). Identity agents therefore form part of identity capital, in other words, all those resources that assist one in the formation of one's identity.

Schachter and Rich (2011) similarly explored the presence of identity-promoting features in the school context. They found that teachers who are caring and who are perceived as role models to the learners have a significant impact on identity formation. In addition, they emphasised that when the curriculum is presented in a way that is meaningful and of interest to the learners, this also has an impact on their sense of identity. These findings confirm that relational processes play a crucial role in the formation of identity. It further emphasises how individuals are inclined to make meaning of their interaction with others. Schachter and Rich (2011) therefore deem it appropriate to define identity as a sense of being a part of something more than the

self, which relates to the concept of a sense of belonging which often develops amongst peers in the adolescent phase.

In South Africa, educators face several challenges such as large classes, inadequate training and insufficient resources (Wild & Swartz, 2012). Côté and Levine (2002) point out that individuals often respond in two ways, namely passive compliance or active adaptation. In South Africa, it appears that in the face of so many pressures, many educators present with passive compliance with policies. This study was therefore conducted with the aim of promoting the active adaption of schools to promote identity formation on the ground level. Some researchers have pointed out that socio-cultural contexts that hold a richness of diversity are likely to provide diverse opportunities for identity formation (Schachter, 2005; Schachter & Ventura, 2008). South Africa, one can argue, has such rich diversity. Therefore, just as context allows the building blocks of identity to come together, one should keep in mind that it can also act as a barrier towards identity formation (Yoder, 2000). Knowledge about how adolescents view their school context and how they perceive its impact on the formation of their identity can therefore offer valuable insights for Schachter's 'identity agents'.

## **2.5 THE SCHOOL CONTEXT AND IDENTITY FORMATION**

The word 'context' can be defined as the interconnected conditions in which something exists or occurs (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Words often used as synonyms include 'setting', 'environment' or 'climate'. The literature indicates that research in the areas of school context and its influence on identity formation has become increasingly popular. As pointed out in Section 2.4.1, children spend a great deal of their developing years in educational institutions, and because adolescence has been indicated as a possible starting point for forming an identity, researchers endeavour to understand how identity is shaped by school context.

A key factor is that the school context provides a sense of continuity between childhood and adolescence, and therefore how they adapt and experience the site of formal education is important (Stoop, 2005). Continuity and change have implications for development, and therefore the school environment is critical to development (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The literature shows that there are several factors in the

school context that can possibly shape adolescent identity formation. Eccles and Roeser (2011) encourage the use of a developmental systems perspective, such as Bronfenbrenner's model (see Section 2.2), in understanding the influences of schools and communities on development. Their aim was to "highlight the reciprocal relations that exist between students and the people and conditions of their school environment" (Eccles & Roeser, 2011, p. 572). Their research indicates that there are five levels of the context of schooling that researchers have explored (see Figure 2.2 for a visual representation for the context of the school). These levels include the following:

- Academic work
- Groups and activity structure
- Teachers, instruction and classroom climate (see Faircloth, 2012)
- Academic tracks and curriculum differences
- Schools as organisations with cultures.

In investigating these areas, researchers have shown that the way in which adolescents make meaning of these experiences has implications for their sense of motivation, wellbeing, behaviour and attitude towards learning and achievement (Faircloth, 2009, 2012; Schachter & Rich, 2011). Eccles and Roeser (2011, p. 580) state that "young people shape their own school experience based on their subjective perceptions of the socialization context and socializing agents in schools". Therefore, alongside the factors mentioned above, the presence of personal characteristics, choices and perceptions that each individual has informs and shapes how they understand their identity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). An area of the school context that has been shown to have a direct impact on how adolescents feel and make meaning is the school climate. Rich and Schachter (2011) in their study indicated that school climate has direct implications for identity formation.

It therefore appears that there exists paucity in understanding adolescents' perceptions of their identity and the role played by the school context, specifically the climate of the school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Schachter & Rich, 2011; Stoop, 2005).



This is emphasised in Stoop's sentiment that "we need to consider what it is really like from [the adolescent's] point of view" (2005, p. 63).

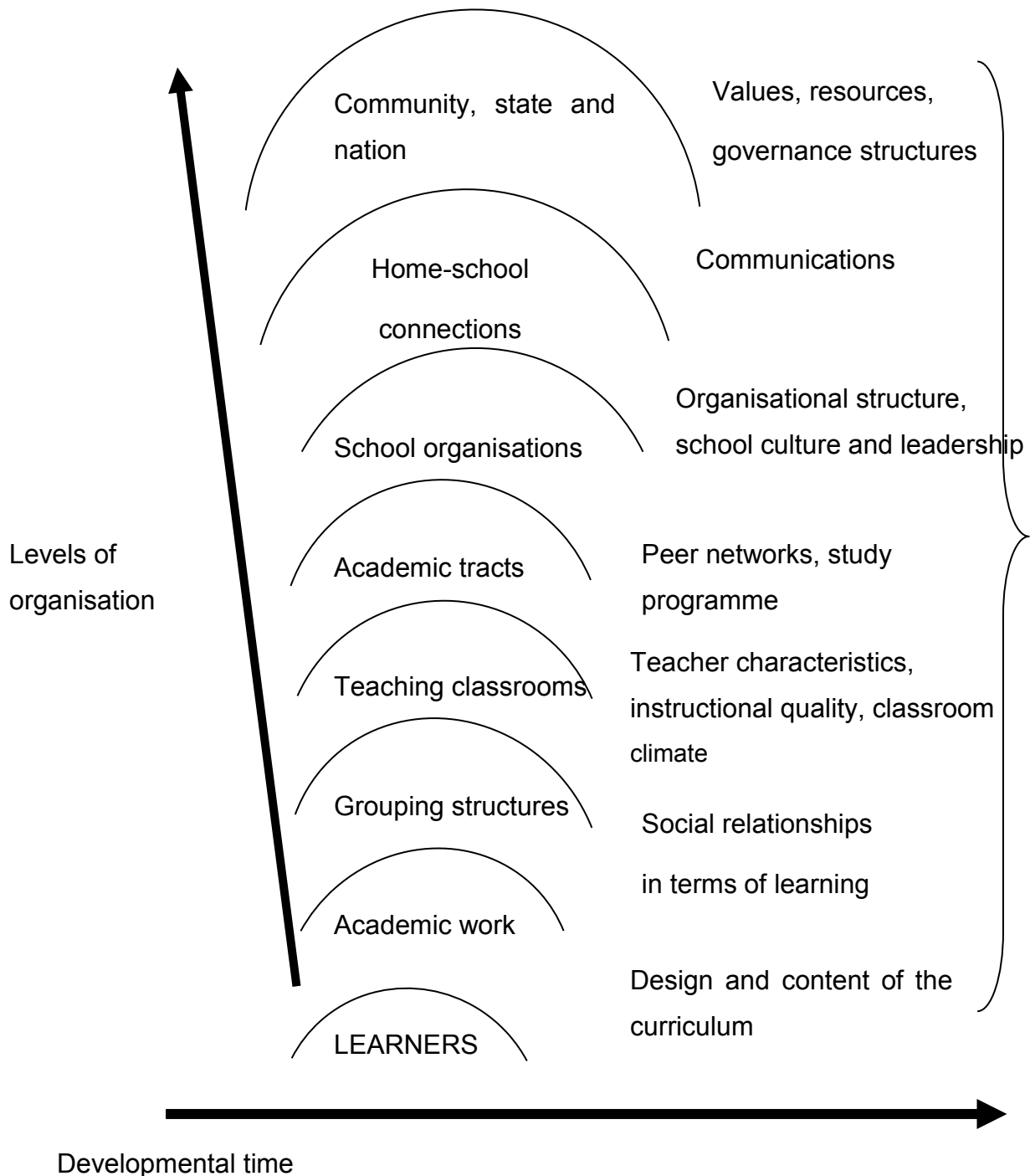
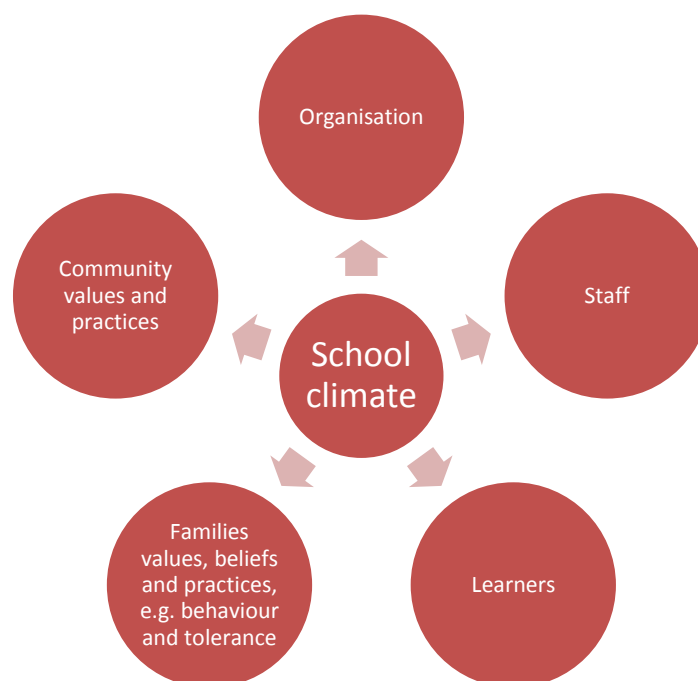


Figure 2.2: Model of the context of schooling (based on Eccles & Roeser, 2011, p. 574)

### 2.5.1 School climate

School climate has been described as the feelings and attitudes elicited by the school's environment, which is multidimensional and includes the physical, social and academic areas of the school context (Loukas, 2007). The physical aspects of the school can refer to the school building, classrooms, school size, resources, and safety and comfort. The social arena can include the quality of relations, equitable and fair treatment, competition and contributions to decision making. Lastly, the academic area can involve the quality of instruction, teaching expectations and monitoring of progress and feedback (Loukas, 2007). Loukas (2007) does however point out that there is great variability in the way individuals perceive these dimensions of the school environment, or experiences within the school environment, which is of interest in this study.

The school climate has also been called a "palpable sense of safety and belonging" that individuals experience ("The Whole School Climate Framework", 2013). Similar to Loukas (2007), it is described as the "sum total of attitudes and behaviour elicited by school policies, interaction, opportunities for engaging with beliefs and attitudes that students bring to school from their parents and the community" (Loukas, 2007, p. 2). Determinants of school climate are depicted in Figure 2.3 below:



*Figure 2.3:* Dimensions of the school climate (based on Loukas, 2007)

Marshall (2004) similarly investigated the factors that influence school climate. He found that the number and quality of interactions, learners' and teachers' perceptions of the school environment of the school's personality, the buildings, classroom and resources, feelings of safety and school size, and feelings of trust and respect are significant elements that determine school climate. However, the research appears limited in terms of adolescents' perception of their experience of these elements.

In addition, it appears that schools of skill have received little attention in considering the impact of the school's climate on the formation of adolescent identity formation. Therefore, in the next section a frame is provided of how special education has developed, and how the school of skills fits in as a special school in South Africa. Finally, the characteristics of the learner that may attend a school of skills are explored.

## **2.6 DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION**

Historically, special education followed a medical deficit model, whereby intervention was focused on addressing the problem *within* the child (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The aim of this model was to categorise individuals according to physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). The individual would then be referred to a professional person, who would diagnose and then consequently 'label' the individual. Swart and Pettipher (2011, p. 5) call this a "model of diagnosis and treatment", implicating that something needs to be fixed.

This action of labelling led to people being called 'handicapped', 'disabled', 'morons' and 'dumb'. Other labels included terms such as 'ADHD', 'learning disabled' and 'dyslexic' (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Often, when people did not know the correct terms, they would use common words such as 'slow' or 'behind'. In this study, the participants used the word "mal", which is an Afrikaans word meaning mad or crazy (see Section 4.2.3.1). Swart and Pettipher (2011, p. 5) point out that labels such as these were easily "attached to children and therefore such children [were] often separated and treated differently". The effect of such words clearly has implications for how adolescents perceive and feel about themselves (Raymond, 2012).

As the bio-ecological model indicates, time plays an important role in how systems change and interact with one another. Fortunately, time brought understanding in the form of a radical shift, whereby the impact of social systems on the individual was acknowledged, as opposed to a sole focus on deficits (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The 21<sup>st</sup> century therefore moved the world towards a positive and a holistic approach to situations. King (2008) points out that a holistic approach looks at disorders, dysfunctions, capacities and strengths, which point to a social ecological model. This model proposes that individuals must be seen within a context and a unique environment and that the influence of social interaction and social learning cannot and must not be discarded.

In response to these shifts in thinking, individuals facing barriers to learning were gradually integrated into mainstream schooling through processes such as normalisation, mainstreaming and integration (see Swart & Pettipher, 2011, for a review). However, these processes continued to place the responsibility on the learner to fit in, as opposed to providing guidelines for how schools could accommodate these learners facing barriers (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). For this reason, 'inclusion' was introduced as a means to "restructure schools in order to respond to the learning needs of *all* children" (Ainscow, 1995, p. 1, as cited in Kinsanji, 1999, p. 3).

In 1994, a world conference on special needs education was held in Salamanca, Spain. Hick, Kershner and Farell (2009) point out that inclusion "emerged as a key international policy" (as cited in Swart & Pettipher, 2011, p. 8), which called schools and governments of the world towards a change in thinking and practice regarding special education (UNESCO, 1994). The conference in Salamanca happened in response to the International UNESCO conference in Jomtein in 1990, and was followed by the International World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. According to Du Toit and Forlin (2009, p. 645), these conferences provided the "momentum for many countries to develop policy to promote inclusion".

The inclusive education approach encouraged a reconceptualisation of values, beliefs and practices regarding learner diversity (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6) emphasised the word 'all', which is clear in the following quotations:

**All** children should learn together ... regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have.

Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students [by] accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to **all** through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school.

An inclusive approach is therefore a move towards educational change, which involves all children and all systems. It reflects a move from the model of identifying the problem within the child towards a bio-ecological model of identifying all relevant systems and ways in which they can adjust to meet the needs of all learners (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). The following definition provides a clear picture of the vision of inclusion:

'Inclusive' does include children with disabilities such as children who have difficulties in seeing or hearing, who cannot walk, or who are slower to learn. **HOWEVER**, 'inclusive' **also** means including ALL children who are left out or excluded from school. These children may not speak the language of the classroom; are at risk of dropping out because they are sick, hungry, or not achieving well; or they belong to a different religion or caste. They also may be girls who are pregnant, children affected by HIV/Aids, and all girls and boys who should be in school but are not, especially those who work at home, in the fields, or elsewhere (migrants) and who have paying jobs to help their families survive. 'Inclusive' means that as teachers, we have the responsibility to seek out all available support (from school authorities, the community, families, children, educational institutions, health services, community leaders, and so on) for finding and facilitating ALL children to learn (Unesco, 1993, p. 3).

Ultimately, it means that everyone needs to get involved. This relates to Schachter's idea of identity agents (see Section 2.4.2). Just as he encourages those working with youths to become active agents in identity formation, so too inclusion calls all relevant parties to become active agents in making this mind shift. An important aspect, however, is that the mind shift to inclusion does not mean that one must

throw out the medical model completely, as diagnosis and categories are still necessary in certain situations (Swart & Pettipher, 2011, p. 9). Instead, one should aspire to finding balance in leaving out the labels and instead looking to the needs of all children and seeing how one can best support them and the school system one is a part of.

In South Africa, several policies were drafted in response to the Salamanca Statement. In 1995, the White Paper on Education and Training was released, and in 1997 the South African Schools Act. In 1997, key policies focusing on special needs education were drafted; among these was the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy. In addition, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) were established. Then, finally, in 2001, White Paper 6 was released. This paper elaborated on a broad range of learning needs and strategies for implementation, and it emphasised that training of teachers would be a priority (Engelbrecht, 2006, p. 255).

The Ministry of Education used this paper to put forward a framework for transformation and change, which aims to "ensure increased and improved access to the education and training" (DoE, 2001, p. 26). The White Paper therefore reflects this 'change in thinking' that recognises the role of the context and the influence of the environment and especially the role of language in facilitating a discourse that promotes a vision of a "more just society and a unified, more equitable, education system by creating schools that are responsive to learner diversity and provide equal educational opportunities for all learners" (Swart, 2004, p. 232). Engelbrecht (1999, as cited in Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, p. 646) support these sentiments by saying that "[i]nclusion in [South Africa] has been promoted as the educational strategy most likely to contribute to a democratic and just society", especially because learners in South Africa come from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds, causing different and diverse learning needs (Engelbrecht et al., 2006, as cited in Du Toit & Forlin, 2009, p. 646).

The manner in which White Paper 6 was to be implemented involved special schools becoming resource centres that would support schools in the transition to inclusion. As indicated in Section 1.2, implementation of these policies are taking time, and

learners are still being referred to special schools. According to the educational statistics of 2013, special schools make up 0.9% of schools in South Africa. In addition, of the 12 680 829 learners enrolled in schools, 6 802 learners were enrolled in special schools in the Western Cape. Unfortunately, there are no specific statistics for schools of skills.

## **2.7 SCHOOL OF SKILLS**

A school of skills falls under the umbrella of special education in South Africa, or what is known as LSEN (learners with special education needs) schools. It is a special needs school that focuses on the vocational or practical skills training of adolescents experiencing barriers to learning (SANASE, 2010).

The term 'school of skills' seems to be unique to South Africa and international equivalents are known as 'vocational schools' or 'vocational education and training' (VET). Other perceptions that are often associated with VET are work-based training and low academic standards (Ryan, 2003). Ryan (2003), a British researcher, noted that in the USA, vocational education (VE) has been seen as an opportunity to encourage low-achieving adolescents to continue their schooling. He further added that in France, VE has been associated with high rates of absenteeism and drop-out. In light of this, Ryan (2003) questioned the social function of vocationalism, because it seemed to be encouraging differentiation and early streaming of learners according to achievement levels, thereby strengthening the phenomenon of social inequality. He adds that "the aspiration to democracy is then frustrated and low achievers find themselves diverted into educational dead ends" (Ryan, 2003, p. 151). Researchers have therefore found that there are high rates of unemployment among adolescents who received vocational training and that there is a lack of work experience and job training after school (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Piopiunik & Ryan, 2012). Bynner and Parsons (2002, p. 291) noted that these deficits are "permanently damaging with regards to unemployment and adjustment to adult life".

In the Netherlands, researchers found that VE is not producing motivated learners, which was the expectation in providing a less academic and more practical stream of education (Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy, 2011). In their research among learners and teachers from 34 schools, Kuijpers et al. (2011) found that this lack in motivation is

related to career competencies. They advocate for the inclusion of dialogue in the classroom about real-life experiences and career-related issues. According to these researchers, career dialogues are more influential than personality traits.

It appears that VE in South Africa, especially schools of skills, experience similar challenges as those of other countries (see Eksteen, 2009; SANASE, 2010). According to the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE, 2012), South Africa's history of apartheid and the emphasis placed on work and labour in education during that time, has been said to have a stigmatising effect on vocational skills training in South Africa. It can therefore be argued that schools of skills carry this stigma of an inferior form of education as a result of this historical context. It appears that some countries, such as South Korea and Australia, experience a similar dilemma, while countries such as Germany, Switzerland and the USA have learnt to manage this challenge (CDE, 2012).

In South Korea, in an effort to overcome the negative attitude towards vocational schools, an attempt was made to change the name of these schools from vocational high schools to professional high schools (CDE, 2012). In Australia, an attempt was made to offer vocational subjects as part of the normal school curriculum, however, they found that such services must be accompanied by support and guidance regarding decision making (CDE, 2012). Germany, Switzerland and the USA have had great success in offering *dual tracks* in the mainstream of education. The success of this is largely due to the strong support of public funding (CDE, 2012). The USA furthermore appears to have success in what they call City Polytechnic High Schools, or City Poly, as it is locally known in New York.

As indicated in Section 1.7.3, in South Africa, learners experiencing difficulties at the primary school level, depending on the nature of their needs, are referred to a school of skills through the district department. According to the Interprovincial Planning Committee for schools of skills, it is envisioned that vocational training becomes an option in the mainstream of education, as is encouraged by our policy documents (SANASE, 2010). Currently, the school of skills has an academic department and a technical department. Learners spend 50% of contact time on academic work, and the other 50% on technical or vocational areas such as welding, catering, painting and hairdressing. According to the new proposed curriculum (SANASE, 2010),



learners will spend four years at the school. The first year will involve an orientation where they will be exposed to all the technical subjects for a short period of time. There is currently no specialised curriculum for learners attending a school of skills. Educators therefore follow the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) regarding guidelines for teaching. The researcher experienced that this is often problematic, as learners require an adapted curriculum that considers the diversity of their learning needs. Therefore, some schools of skills have adopted the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programme to accommodate these learning needs.

### **2.7.1 General profile of a learner attending a school of skills**

The Interprovincial Planning Committee for schools of skill provides the following general characteristics of individuals who attend a school of skills (SANASE, 2010, p. 6):

- Mild learning disabilities because of their intellectual ability
- Barriers to learning such as a curriculum not adapted to suit the needs and interests of the learners, negative attitudes to and stereotyping of differences, and inappropriate communication skills
- Poor to very poor scholastic abilities, especially with regard to reading, writing and numeric skills
- Low self-esteem and negative self-concept, especially an academic self-concept, because of a history of failure throughout primary school years - which often results in feelings of inferiority
- Referred to in mainstream schools as lazy, not interested, bored, daydreamers, anti-social, not motivated, negative, disruptive, drop-outs, and so forth
- Emotionally and spiritually very immature and dependent on others
- Experience frustration, anxiety, fear and sometimes aggression due to an inability to cope with the tempo and the overloaded curriculum of mainstream schools
- Unrealistic expectations of the future

- Lack of motivation to study academically and therefore more inclined to drop out of school to enter the labour market or remain unemployed and become a burden to society
- Choice of mostly practically orientated professions
- Poor perseverance in the completion of tasks, except when they find enjoyment in it or when they see immediate results
- Inadequate social skills in the community
- Mostly from families experiencing socio-economic back-logs
- Mostly from families with inadequate parental authority and discipline, resulting in learners with irresponsible attitudes.

The planning committee further adds that "despite the serious nature of the above, one must be careful not to attach all these characteristics to every mildly intellectually disabled learner, but they must serve as general guidelines to identify such a learner" (SANASE, 2010).

The literature shows that schools of skills face being stigmatised. According to Eksteen (2009, p. 46), "the community labels them", and this, one can argue, has an impact on the school climate. As indicated in Section 2.5.1, the school climate consists of the feeling, attitudes, beliefs and experiences that are generated in the school context. Consequently, one can expect that these aspects shape the identity formation of the individuals who attend the school. Eccles and Roeser (2011) refer to the influence of low-track placements, which is similar to that of special school placements. They state that low-track placements have been related to poor attitudes towards school, feelings of incompetence and problem behaviour in school and in the community, which are similarly evident in learners placed at special schools (Eksteen, 2009; SANASE, 2010).

## **2.8 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model and Erikson's psychosocial theory of development have been presented to provide insight into understanding identity formation in the adolescent phase and the importance of the school context

in shaping this process. Studies have primarily focused on research that can be used to generalise findings to the larger population. This information is valuable in understanding identity formation and adolescents' experiences in the school context; however, the voice of adolescent and their unique story and experiences are often lost in this process (Stoop, 2005; Swartz et al., 2011). Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to consult adolescents specifically on how they perceive their identity and which experiences at a school of skills shaped this identity in their opinion.

## Chapter 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate how adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity and the role the school context played in shaping this sense of identity. In order to investigate this phenomenon, the researcher had to decide on a research paradigm that would inform the design and methods used to achieve the objectives of the study. These aspects have been introduced briefly in Chapter 1, and are now explored further for the purpose of providing clarity regarding the dimensions and generic activities of this study.

The previous chapter described the theories that provide a framework for understanding adolescent identity formation and the influence of the school context. In addition, it provided a review of the literature regarding this phenomenon. The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the steps taken to answer the proposed research question. The researcher therefore elaborates on the research process, which involved a review of the literature, approaching suitable participants and collecting data. The researcher further describes how the data were analysed and interpreted. Finally, the limitations and ethical considerations relevant to this study are discussed. These activities are significantly interlinked, and give structure and purpose to the research study.

### 3.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Jones and Deutsch (2013) point out that many researchers today have a keen interest in understanding the relationship between person and context. Following on this path, and informed by a review of the literature and a theoretical framework, the research was guided by the following question, as well as three sub-questions:

## **How do adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity?**

The sub-questions that will also be explored are:

1. How do they see themselves?
2. What experiences have shaped the way they view themselves?
3. What role do they think attending a school of skills played in shaping the way they see themselves?

Silverman (2010) encourages researchers to consider the specific task at hand when choosing a research design and methodology. In addition, as the task at hand was aimed at understanding the perceptions of adolescents regarding their sense of identity and the role of the school context in shaping that identity, the researcher chose a qualitative research design. This design is embedded in an interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), which guided each step of the research process.

### **3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

In considering a research paradigm, researchers are encouraged to reflect on how they view reality, what the purpose of the research is and the type of knowledge that will be produced from the investigation (Merriam, 2009). These views and beliefs inevitably have an impact on how the researcher sees the world and how it should be studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The selected paradigm therefore influences and informs each dimension and process involved in the research study. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) describe three paradigms that researchers generally use to frame their research. A summary of the main aim in each paradigm is depicted in Table 3.1 below.

In considering these aspects and the research questions, the researcher placed this study within an interpretive paradigm, which seeks to understand the subjective world of human experience. In this paradigm researchers aim "to retain the integrity of the phenomenon being investigated, [therefore] efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 17). The nature of knowledge within this paradigm is therefore accepted as having multiple

meanings, and therefore to understand the phenomenon the researcher goes to specific units to gather data about experiences, beliefs, attitudes and feelings (Silverman, 2005). Guided by this framework, the researcher selected those who would possibly provide rich data on the phenomenon being studied, which in this study was the adolescents' perception of their identity and the role played by the school context.

**Table 3.1: Paradigms in social sciences (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006)**

<b><u>POSITIVIST</u></b>	<b><u>INTERPRETIVE</u></b>	<b><u>CONSTRUCTIONIST</u></b>
To provide an accurate description of the laws and mechanisms that operate in social life	To explain the subjective meanings and reasons that lie behind social actions	To show how versions of the social world are produced in discourse

The interpretive paradigm also views the world as constantly changing and evolving as humans make meaning and interact with one another (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, in this paradigm, knowledge is not static, and therefore cannot be generalised to larger populations, as is common in the positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2010). Instead, knowledge is created in interaction between the researcher, the participant and the data gathered. The researcher therefore aims to approach a small sample of participants so as to gather data on unique experiences (Silverman, 2010). The description of this experience therefore needs to be done in depth, as "researchers in this paradigm seek to understand rather than explain" (Du Plessis, 2012, p. 45).

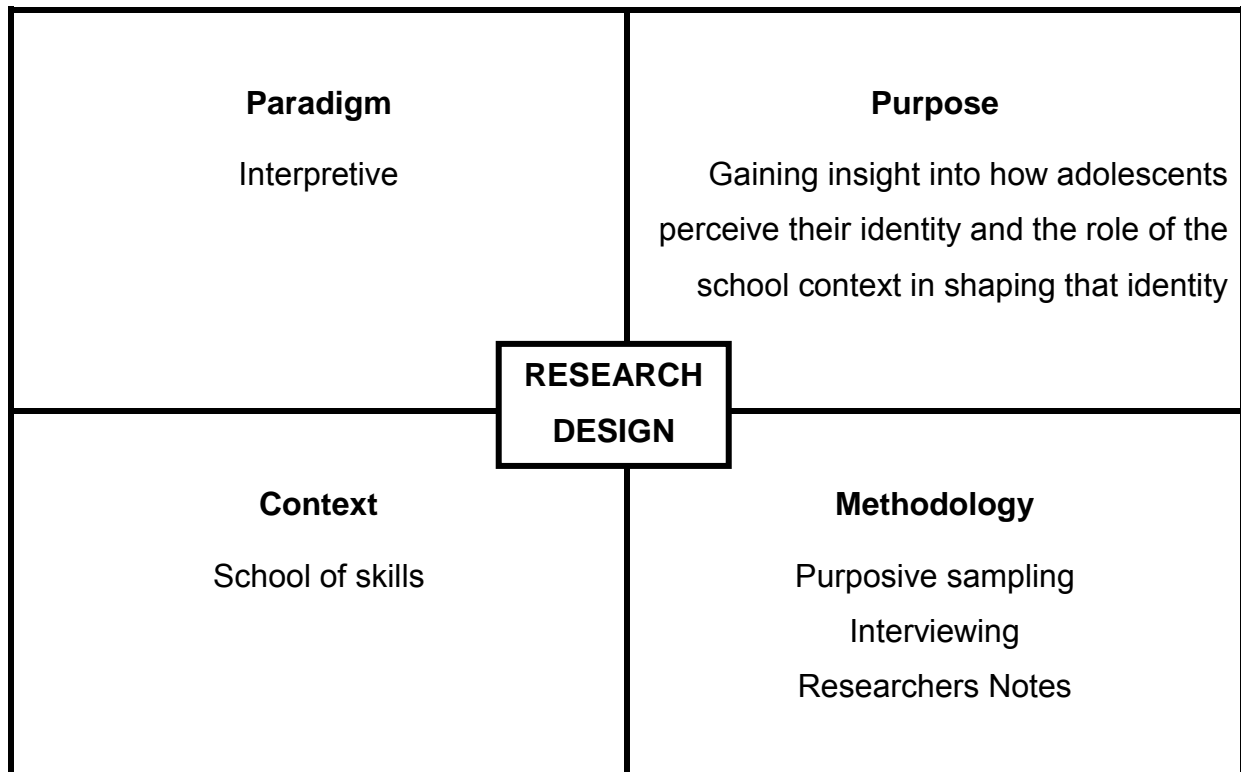
Therefore, informed by this paradigm, the researcher chose a basic qualitative research design that is embedded in the interpretive paradigm, and that provides qualitative methods that will aid in the purpose of this investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is a plan of how the researcher will link the purpose of the research and the research questions to specific steps taken to answer those

questions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). It further reflects the decisions made by the researcher on which aspects will be given priority in the research process (Bryman, 2012). Guided by these definitions and the interpretive paradigm, this study adopted a basic qualitative research design. A visual representation of this design is provided in Table 3.2 below:

**Table 3.2: The research design of the current study (adapted from Du Plessis, 2012)**



According to Merriam (2009), a basic qualitative design has three main features. Firstly, it is based on the belief that individuals construct their reality in interaction with their social world. Secondly, the viewpoint is that meaning is created through interviewing; and thirdly, it seeks to uncover and interpret how people make meaning. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) similarly state that qualitative research seeks to "make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". These features relate to the theoretical framework described in Chapter 2 as well as the interpretive paradigm in that experience, meaning and interaction with others are common key factors.

Qualitative research was further a sound fit for this study, as it guides researchers in exploring the everyday lives of people, be it the extraordinary or the mundane. The

key is a desire to draw out the meaning that their experience has for them. In Section 2.3, identity formation was described as a product and a process of relational processes. Informed by this conceptualisation, the researcher sought to explore the experiences that adolescents used to make meaning and that contributed to their identity formation. It is therefore the insider's perspective that is of interest in this study, and which is commonly prized in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

Another characteristic feature of qualitative research is that it acknowledges the researcher as the primary research instrument. Merriam (2009) clarifies the role of the researcher: The researcher is immediately responsive, she can expand knowledge by probing for relevant information, can process information immediately, clarify and summarise points with the research participants, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses. Merriam's description of the role of the researcher relates to Kvale's (1996) metaphor of a miner. The researcher is there to dig, for meaning and understanding, and perhaps finds some real diamonds. In contrast, a quantitative research design allows researchers to generalise the results for a large population; however, these results often do not allow researchers the opportunity to clarify certain points with the participants, as the samples are too large (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Finally, a qualitative research design involves an inductive process, whereby the researcher gathers data towards building a conceptual understanding. Merriam (2009, p. 5) states that "a framework is not tested, rather it is informed by what [is] inductively [learnt]" during the research process. Miles and Huberman state that "knowing what you want to find out leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information" (1984, as cited in Silverman, 2010). The *how* of this study is therefore discussed in the next section on research methodology.

### **3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A research design informs the specific strategies or techniques that will be used to collect and analyse the data to be studied (Bryman, 2012). As indicated in Table 3.2 above, this study made use of qualitative methods, which included purposive sampling, interviewing, the use of researcher's notes as secondary data and thematic content analysis. Silverman (2005) advises researchers to start their research in



familiar territory. In addition, the methods that one makes use of should be a natural extension of what one already enjoys doing (Silverman, 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher became aware of the research problem during her experience as a counsellor at a school of skills. During this time, the researcher was able to engage with learners, and to observe feelings and behaviours that started to concern the researcher. The researcher therefore decided to make use of her knowledge and experiences as a starting point to the study, which according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) is a normal place for a starting point. In addition, the familiar territory gave the researcher the opportunity to identify participants who could possibly provide rich data for the study. The method of selecting participants is discussed in Section 3.5.2.

Regarding Silverman's second piece of advice; as a counsellor, the researcher acquired training in interviewing skills, and it was a method that the researcher felt comfortable and competent in using. Interviewing is furthermore a common and valued method in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This method and the way it was used in this study will be explored further in Section 3.5.3 as a method of data collection.

### **3.5.1 Context of the study**

In Chapter 1 the researcher indicated that she had become familiar with the context of a school of skills during her time as student and later as an employee for a period of three years. The context of the school of skills was discussed in Section 2.7. However, the research was not conducted in the setting of a particular school. Instead, as the purpose of the research was to uncover the feelings, beliefs and experiences of the participants regarding their sense of identity and the role the school context played in shaping this identity, the researcher went to the context in which the participant felt comfortable to share these experiences, namely their homes. The setting of each home was described in fieldnotes made by the researcher during the interviews, as well as the participants' description of their school context (see Appendix G).

In addition, the participants chosen for this study were adolescents who *had* attended a school of skills. The interviews therefore encouraged the participants to reflect on their experiences, a process that in itself encourages meaning making within the individual and in interaction with the researcher (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).

### **3.5.2 Selection of participants**

The researcher found Daniel's (2012) guidelines on criteria for selecting participants very useful. These guidelines suggest a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria one should use when defining the target population. Inclusion criteria include the nature of the elements, the sampling units, the geographic location and the time period (Daniel, 2012, p. 9).

The participants considered for this study are learners who were placed at a school of skills by the local district education department because of barriers to learning they experienced at mainstream schools (nature of elements); the participants are individuals in the adolescent phase who have left the school of skills, whether they had completed their schooling successfully or decided to leave (sampling units); and the participants chosen for the study may or may not necessarily be from the same geographic location; therefore, it was the researcher's opinion that the geographic location is not relevant to the study, as it is the participants' experience at a school of skills that was to be studied. In addition, identification of the geographic location may jeopardise the anonymity provided to the participants. However, it can be noted that the participants are located in areas indicated as having low socioeconomic status. Finally, the time period is indicated in that these adolescents left school one to two years ago, and the interviews were held between June and October 2013.

The participants were therefore selected using a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to make a judgement in choosing the participants that will provide informant or "special knowledge" on the research topic (Daniel, 2012, p. 91), and whom the researcher "believes will be good sources of information" (Patton, 2002, p. 51). The ethics committee indicated a concern that the researcher may coerce the participants to take part in the study; however, one can agree with Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 77) that "[p]eople are usually more willing to talk to you if they feel some personal connection to you". Perhaps for this reason,

qualitative research is often criticised for lacking objectivity and being biased. However, objectivity could hold the risk of causing belief that there is one reality, whereas qualitative research acknowledges that there are multiple realities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) therefore maintain that a more appropriate term would be that of 'intersubjectivity'. Therefore, being familiar with the researcher allowed the participants to be comfortable in sharing their intersubjective experiences, thoughts and feelings.

One may therefore question whether all former learners who had attended a school of skills fall within the target population of this study. However, as the aim of the study was to be descriptive and gain insight into the individual experience of participants who willingly chose to participate in this study, and because it was not the researcher's intention to generalise the experiences of the participants to all those who have attended a school of skills, a small number of four participants were included in this study.

Identity formation is an individual and a social process (see Section 2.3). It also involves the process of meaning making. Therefore, the researcher involved the parents of the participants to talk about how they think their child perceives his or her identity and the role school context played in shaping this sense of identity. As discussed in Section 2.4.1, parents have a unique impact on the process of identity formation in the adolescent phase. This influence often relates to their parenting style and the nature of the parent-child relationship. The expectation was therefore that parents would offer valuable insights into the way participants make meaning of their sense of identity.

The objective was, however, to inform the practices of counsellors and educators working in the context of a school of skills, therefore, regardless of differences in each participant's experience, this objective was likely to be met. As Patton (2002, p. 7) points out, it is the *quality* of the insights generated that is important, and not necessarily the *quantity* of the insights.

### **3.5.3 Methods of data collection**

#### **3.5.3.1 Literature review**

A literature review is often the first phase in the research process (Mouton, 2012). According to Mouton (2012), it should in fact be called a scholarship review, as the purpose is to gather information on what other researchers have studied about the unit of analysis and what they found, and perhaps also consider the gaps in research that they have pointed out (Mouton, 2012). To review the scholarship, the researcher made use of the SunSearch, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Sabinet and Sage research databases. Search terms included *identity*, *identity formation*, *adolescence*, *school context*, *school climate*, *schools of skills*, *special schools and vocational schools*.

This search led the researcher towards developing a framework for understanding what is known about school context and its impact on identity formation in the adolescent phase. This framework firstly involved an exploration of the perspective of the bio-ecological system to gain insight into the developing individual as a system embedded in several other systems (see Section 2.2). Secondly, it framed the various ways in which identity is defined, and further what is known about how identity formation occurs in the adolescent phase. Finally, the context in which the developing individual is imbedded was also explored, and it was found that there is paucity in understanding the role that attendance of a school of skills can have in shaping identity formation.

Kaplan and Flum (2010) in their research further argue that identity formation often *frames* how we interpret situations, how we act and how we cope with different challenges. Parents, educators and counsellors can therefore be said to have a pertinent role to play in preparing adolescents for the outside world. This research was therefore aimed at informing the practices and thinking of identity agents (see Schachter, 2005).

#### **3.5.3.2 Interviewing**

The primary method of data collection was the use of semi-structured interviews. Rubin and Rubin (2012) refer to qualitative interviewing as the *art of hearing*, which

the researcher finds descriptive in understanding the value of giving voice to the research participants and their experiences. The researcher's aim in using a semi-structured interview guide was to have a number of prepared themes that would guide the eliciting of information on the topic that the researcher is interested in (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), as qualitative research interviews are generally theme-orientated (Kvale, 1996). According to Kvale (1996, p. 29), "the purpose is to describe and understand the central themes the subject experiences".

The interview guide was informed by the research questions and the review of the literature. The literature informed the understanding that identity formation involves the thoughts and feelings one has about oneself, what one considers other think, and how one thinks about the future in terms of choices, dreams and expectations. The objective is also to explore how adolescents perceive the role of their school context in shaping their sense of identity, their school experience and relationships also formed part of the key themes discussed in the interviews. These themes can be found in the interview guide (Appendix D).

During the planning phase of the research, the interview guide was used in a pilot study with an individual who attended a school of skills four years prior to the present study. The pilot interview was done to assess the effectiveness of the themes, and to test the recording equipment and the researcher's ability to probe for information that would assist in answering the research questions, as recommended by Silverman (2010). After this interview, several decisions were made.

Firstly, the researcher added probing questions beneath each theme in the interview guide. Themes alone were not sufficient, as the participant often provided short and uncertain answers.

Secondly, it was decided to add an element of visual elicitation. Visual elicitation is a participatory visual method in research. It is defined as "photographs, drawings or diagrams in a research interview to stimulate a response" (Prosser, 2011, p. 484). The researcher therefore made use of two methods of visual elicitation, namely the *self-portrait* and the *timeline*, as described by Bagnoli (2009). Bagnoli (2009, p. 565) found these two methods very useful in gaining a "narration of the holistic picture of identity". The aim was not to interpret or analyse the self-portrait or the timeline, and

therefore these elements are not included as evidence. Instead, the aim was to assist participants in thinking about how they see themselves and the things that are important to them. According to Prosser (2011) the use of visual tasks can elicit a variety of different responses and it has the potential to encourage dialogue in an interview. Participants were therefore asked to do the following:

*Draw a picture of how you see yourself, and add the things that you think are important in your life.*

*Draw a timeline of your life. Include events and changes in your life and in the wider world that you think were important.*

Thirdly, during the pilot study the participant's parent joined later during the conversation and offered valuable information that offered insight into the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, it was decided to include the parents' views on their child's sense of identity and experience at a school of skills, as another perspective, but also as a means of data verification and triangulation. Sapsford and Jupp (2006, p. 92) define triangulation as "bringing more than one method or researcher or source of information to bear on the same area of investigation". As a result, an interview guide for the participants and a separate shortened form for the parents were created (see Appendix D).

The interview guide was formulated in English. However, two of the participants were Afrikaans speaking, and the researcher was able to translate the questions in a way that the participants could understand. The researcher, as a South African coloured person, was knowledgeable about the local culture and was therefore able to make use of colloquial Afrikaans terms that allowed the participants to engage with the researcher. The research interview is, as Kvale (1996, p. 36) points out, "an interaction [and structured conversation] between two people". The researcher therefore engaged with the participants in a conversational manner. However, the purpose of the task at hand was kept in mind. It was therefore often necessary for the researcher to make use of additional probing and formulation of questions in response to what the participants said, as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 31). This is common and characteristic of semi-structured interviews.

Qualitative interviewing is described as the "study of lived experiences and the ways [people] understand those experiences" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). This method therefore suited the aims of this study. Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 148) further point out that a "primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher's personal experience combined with those of the interview partners". The researcher was also privileged to be able to observe how "through talking [the] subject [participant] may suddenly see relations that they had not been conscious of earlier" (Kvale, 1996, p. 34), which not only brought value to the study but also to the life of the participant.

### **3.5.3.3 *Researcher's notes***

The researcher's notes contributed towards triangulation of the data by adding another source of information (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). The literature shows that there are many types of notes, often called fieldnotes, a research journal or reflective notes. A common piece of advice is that researchers make their notes as soon as possible after the observation or interview. In this study, the researcher travelled to the homes of the participants, and therefore on the drive home, the researcher was able to reflect on the interview; on what was said, on observations made in the setting and on feelings that the researcher had during the interview. The researcher therefore made use of a tape recorder while driving, and then added to the notes as the process continued.

The researcher's notes included basic information such as date, time and place, and any other information about the context or relevant behaviours, following Sapsford and Jupp (2006, p. 84). The researcher also made use of Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein's (1997 cited in Sapsford & Jupp, 2006) list of what should be included in fieldnotes as a guideline for the researcher's notes. This list consists of the following:

- Date, time and place of observation
- Specific facts, numbers and details of what happens at the site
- Sensory impressions such as sights, sounds, textures, smells and taste
- Personal responses to the fact of recording fieldnotes
- Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations and insider language

- Questions about people or behaviours at the site for future investigation
- Page numbers to help keep observations in order.

The researcher's notes and the participants' responses are subjective, and for this reason the possible occurrence of bias is high. However, Sapsford and Jupp (2006) point out that even as bias becomes more likely, so too does understanding of the phenomenon increase. The researcher therefore made use of reflexive practice, as described by Sapsford and Jupp (2006, pp. 91, 249) in the quotations below, to guide and direct the recording of notes.

"Reflexivity [is] the awareness of the impact of the procedures and the characteristics of the researcher, and the particular events which happened to occur during the study, on the nature of the data collected. Awareness that the researcher's preoccupations and latent interests may shape the conclusions drawn from the data ...

[Therefore] [w]hat you feel may be what your subjects feel or may have felt in the past. Your first impression may be the same one that others have had. You should use your feelings, beliefs, preoccupations, and prejudices to help develop hypotheses [in this case, your understanding]".

#### **3.5.3.4 *Recording the data***

The interviews with the participants and their parents were recorded with an audio recorder, and then transcribed verbatim. Transcripts as well as the researcher's notes were used as raw data for analysis. A portion of the transcript with the fourth participant was included in Appendix E, and a portion of the researcher's notes was also included in Appendix G.

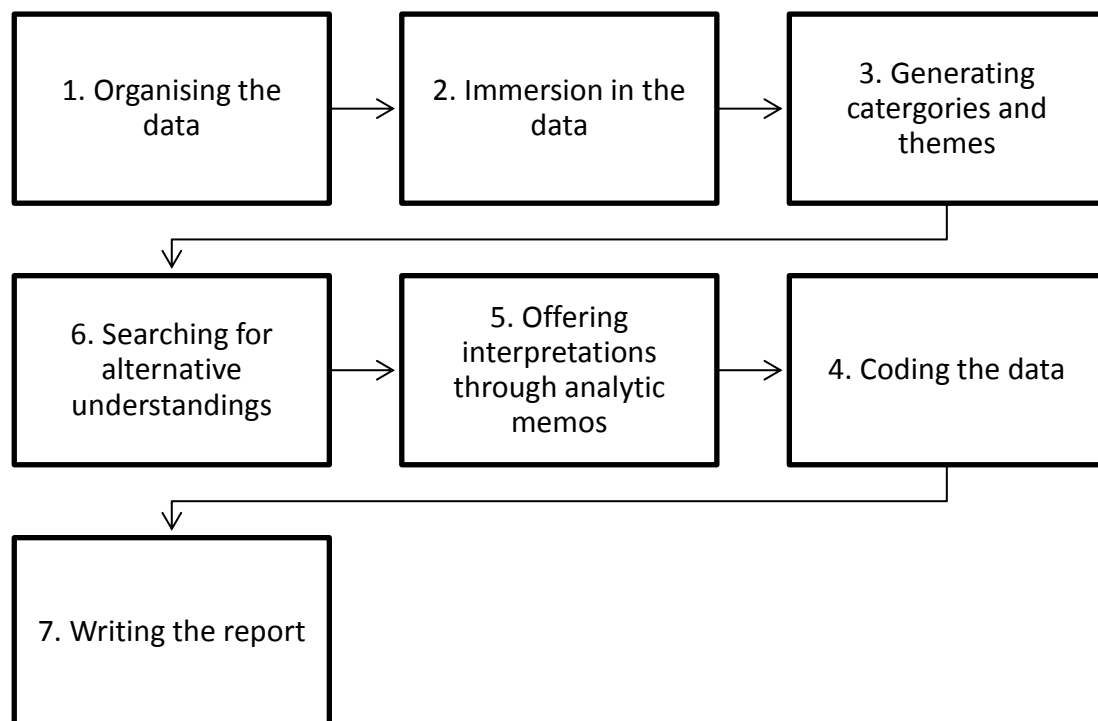
#### **3.5.4 *Data analysis and interpretation***

Data analysis and interpretation in a qualitative research design seek to explore and describe relations and underlying themes in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). For this reason it is not a linear process, as can be expected in a pre-test-post-test experiment, which is characteristic of a quantitative approach to research. Instead, the researcher aims to attach significance to what was found, "making sense of the



findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order" (Patton, 2002, p. 480, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 219).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) name four types of data analysis in qualitative research. These include analytic induction, constant comparative method analysis, grounded theory development and template and editing. As indicated in Section 1.5.5, this researcher undertook a thematic content analysis, which falls in the category of analytic induction according to Marshall and Rossman's types of analysis. They further explain that the analytic process occurs in seven phases. These phases are depicted in Figure 3.1 below:



*Figure 3.1:* Seven phases of data analysis

The process therefore started with a method called open coding. The researcher, keeping the literature review as well as the research questions in mind, identified statements and relations that appeared significant. Henning (2004, p. 102) identified these elements as "units of meaning" given to the data. These activities form part of the first two phases of data analysis, whereby the researcher aims to organise and become immersed in the data.

The third phase, often referred to as axial coding, involves identifying theoretical properties, categories and themes highlighted by the data. Marshall and Rosssman (2011) also encourage the use of an analytic memo, which means that during the first three phases, the researcher should continuously reflect, link ideas, correlate with the literature and seek alternative explanations for themes that appear. One can agree with the statement that "alternative explanations always exist, and [that] the researcher must identify and describe them and then demonstrate how the explanation that he [or she] offers is the most plausible" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 221). Coding, analytic memos, and offering interpretations and alternative possibilities form part of the fourth, fifth and sixth phases of data analysis respectively. Finally, as indicated in Figure 3.1, the seventh phase involves writing the report.

A sample of the coding system used in this research study can be viewed in Appendix H. Furthermore, the research findings and discussion are provided in Chapter 4.

### **3.5.5 Data-verification strategies**

Research studies are commonly evaluated according to their reliability and validity. Reliability generally refers to the replicability of the study and to obtaining the same results, and validity refers to the accuracy of the results (Silverman, 2010). In qualitative research the focus is less on replicability and accuracy, and more on its level of trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). These authors indicate that in qualitative research, because data is subjective in nature, the terms 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability' are more appropriate.

The following strategies were used to increase the trustworthiness of the results in this study:

#### **3.5.5.1 Triangulation**

Researchers (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2010) encourage the use of triangulation in qualitative research. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources. Triangulation was incorporated by including the views of

the parents and the researcher's notes as an additional source of information (Silverman, 2010).

#### **3.5.5.2 Reflexivity**

The researcher engaged in reflexive practice throughout the process. Etherington (2004, p. 32) describes reflexivity as "researchers' capacity to acknowledge their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing)". These aspects inform the process and outcomes of the inquiry and make one aware of how one's own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment, social and personal history informs and contributes to the way in which one interacts with the participants (Etherington, 2004). For example, in Section 3.6 the researcher discusses personal issues that informed the research questions, and in Chapter 5 the researcher describes how the results of the study informed the initial assumptions which the researcher had at the start of the investigation (see section 3.5.1).

In addition, in seeking alternative explanations and discussing critical ideas with peers and the researcher's supervisor, the researcher further increased the trustworthiness of the results, as recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2011).

#### **3.5.5.3 Transparency**

In this chapter, the researcher attempted to document the research strategy and data-analysis methods used in as much detail as possible, which serve to increase the reliability of the study. Transparency also includes a clear indication of the theoretical framework used to gain insight into the phenomenon (Silverman, 2010). In this regard, the theoretical framework used for this study was discussed in Chapter 2.

#### **3.5.5.4 Pilot interview**

As indicated in Section 3.5.3.2, the researcher piloted the interview guide before initiating the study. The pilot interview provided valuable information that informed the researcher of necessary changes to the interview guide, such as additional probes and the use of a graphic elicitation strategy. The researcher's training in interviewing skills and experience as a counsellor further increases the trustworthiness of the results, as confirmed by Silverman (2010).

### 3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Merriam (2009) advises researchers to be aware that their very involvement in the research could be considered a limitation. This is primarily because behind each step of the research process "stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 11). Two forms of bias are therefore possible. Firstly, researcher bias occurs when the researcher listens or looks for information that fits the researcher's own hypothesis for the research. The second form is participant bias, in which the participant provides details that he or she thinks the researcher wants to hear. However, qualitative researchers also believe that individuals make meaning in interaction with others, therefore the researcher remained open-minded, acknowledging that the results may be very different from what she may have expected.

The researcher was aware that previous involvement with the participants may have caused bias; however, the 'insider status' that the researcher had before may also have provided unique information from experience, which may not be available to other researchers (Dawson, 2007). The researcher also described her own experience as a point of departure - described by Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 64) as a "real world investigation". However, phenomenological research cannot be based on personal theory alone (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Instead, the researcher is encouraged to "move beyond inspiration to systematic consideration [...] of empirical research" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 64). In addition, some have considered emotions, passions and biases as having the potential to become research tools (Copp, 2008 and Kleiman & Copp, 1993, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 97). Therefore, the researcher's open-mindedness, reflexivity and awareness of the possibility of these biases were key elements in this study.

The small sample may be considered another limitation to the study. However, the aim of the research was to provide rich descriptions of individual perceptions and experiences. It was not the aim to generalise the findings from this study to all individuals who have attended a school of skills. It is believed, that however small, the unique feelings and experiences shared by the participants will add to the literature on what is known about identity formation and the role of the school

context. In addition, however few, the contributions can offer invaluable insights which one hopes will encourage the emergence of identity agents in the school context.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical practice has become an integral part of contemporary social research. Miller, Mauthner, Birch and Jessop (2012, p. 18) state that "ethical decisions arise throughout the entire research process, from conceptualization and design, to data gathering and analysis. Key issues regarding ethical practice in this study were gaining access, obtaining consent and respecting the participants' rights to confidentiality.

#### **3.7.1 Ethical clearance**

The researcher aligned herself with the psychological principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, as posited by Allen (2008), which in essence reflects a desire to do no harm. Therefore, prior to initiating the present research study, the researcher applied for ethical clearance. Permission was granted to perform this study from the Research Ethics Committee of Human Research (Humanities) of Stellenbosch University (Appendix A). As indicated in Section 3.5.2, several participants were contacted and informed of the aims of the study. Four participants voluntarily participated, along with their parents. It was made clear to the participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time.

#### **3.7.2 Informed consent**

The research participants were individuals aged 18 and above. The participants were therefore legally able to give consent. However, an extensive consent form was prepared for the participants and their parents, stipulating the aims and details of the research study (addenda B and C). The informed consent form was read with the participants and their parents, the researcher encouraged the participants to ask questions and offered to clarify any aspects, after which the forms were signed by the participants, their parents and the researcher.

### **3.7.3 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality was discussed with the research participants prior to the interviews. Details and steps taken to ensure confidentiality were also discussed in the consent forms. The participants consented to the interviews being discussed with the supervisor of the research. In addition, the participants' anonymity was upheld by making use of pseudonyms, omitting identifying details and protecting data on the researcher's computer with a security password.

## **3.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided a discussion of the paradigm, design and methods used in this study. These elements were guided and informed by the research question, which is: How do adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their sense of identity? This chapter further provided a detailed description of the data-collection methods and the phases followed in the process of data analysis, interpretation and verification. The researcher further discussed the limitations and ethical considerations pertinent to the present study. Chapter 4 provides a presentation and discussion of the research findings.

## CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of Chapter 3 was to provide a step-by-step description of the research process, thereby allowing transparency and increasing the credibility of the study (Silverman, 2010). As discussed before, this study made use of a basic qualitative research design, which guided the investigation. In this chapter the findings of the research will be presented according to the themes that emerged during the thematic content analysis of the data. At the end of each theme there will be a discussion of the findings in relation to the relevant literature.

The process of gathering and analysing the data was guided by the research question: *How do adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity?* In addition, the sub-questions that further guided this process were:

*How do they see themselves?*

*What experiences have shaped the way they view themselves?*

*What role do they think attending a school of skills played in shaping how they see themselves?*

As indicated in Chapter 3, qualitative research respects that knowledge is not static and that it is a process of meaning making, which is essentially a subjective process. The findings reflect this phenomenon in its diversity and richness of responses provided by the participants. The researcher therefore presents the findings in the form of a narrative vignette of each participant. The aim of using these vignettes is to illustrate how individuals constructed their sense of identity in light of their experiences with significant others over time and especially in the context of the school of skills.

## **Jack\*\***

*Jack is 18 years old. He lives with his mother, father and two siblings. Jack sees himself as a **"normal"** child, who enjoys working with his hands, and finds that people often ask him for help. This makes him feel good about himself. At primary school he experienced difficulties with learning and **"keeping up"** with his classmates. His parents decided to enrol him at a school of skills, where they **"expected"** that his learning needs would be accommodated and where he would **"learn a skill that would give him job opportunities"**. Jack's parents **"regret"** sending him to that school, they feel that **"he wasted his time there"**, that it was a **"daycare centre"**, a **"prison for children who have behaviour problems"** and who are **"mentally retarded"**. Jack feels that he was branded a **"mad"** person because of his attendance at that school. Jack feels that he **"enjoyed learning a skill"**, but he also felt that his teachers **"didn't care"** about him, and that they did not give him a **"fair chance"** to learn a skill that would mean something to him. Jack also felt that the school had a **"lack of discipline"** and he always felt unsafe at school.*

*He feels that he has nothing behind his name, that he is a **"no one"**. He wishes that he **"never went to that school"**. The only thing that made each day bearable was that he had his friends. They were a group who shared similar feelings about the school, and they felt connected in that they were the **"normal ones"**. Jack feels that he would have been able to **"cope at a normal high school"**, if he had only been given the chance. Jack's parents **"blame"** themselves. They feel that they should have given their son the opportunity, but they had been afraid that **"he would not cope at high school"** and that he may have **"dropped out"**. They feel angry with the school of skills for **"wasting"** their son's years. Jack feels motivated to study further at a college, he believes that he **"will always be nothing"** until he has **"something behind his name"**. He feels that his parents raised him well, and with their encouragement he plans to **"work hard"** and **"make something of"** himself.*



## **Julie\*\***

*Julie is also 18 years old. She lives with her mother and her brothers. Julie sees herself as a "quiet person", with a "soft heart that cares about people" and who "wants to help" people. Julie feels that she knows all about the realities of life. She experienced sadness at a young age when her father passed away. This had a big impact on her learning. She feels that she had not been "serious" about school during her primary years, and as a result she struggled with learning, and she "didn't like reading". Julie feels that going to a school of skills was the "best thing" that happened to her. At first she was "ashamed" because people said it was a school for "mad" children. After a while she "didn't care what people thought" anymore, because she realised that "they didn't know what a school of skills is really about". At the school of skills she experienced teachers "caring" about her. One teacher "encouraged her to be more lady-like". She feels that her "teachers saw something in her" that she "never saw" in herself, and this encouraged her to "believe" in herself and see the "leader" that they saw in her. Julie feels that the school gave her an "opportunity to make something" of her life. At the school she also developed a close friendship. Julie felt that they were "like sisters", and they did "everything" together. Julie and her mother feel that because of her experience, she has been able to "change the way other people in her community think about the school" she attended. Julie now sees herself as someone who "cares about people" and she feels "motivated to study further", so that she can "help people". Julie's mother supports her whole-heartedly. She feels that attending a school of skills made a "big difference in her child", in that she shows more "respect" and has become "independent". Julie has "big dreams" for her future, and feels "confident" that she will reach them.*

## **Rosie\*\***

*Rosie is 18 years old. She lives with her mother, father and her brothers. Rosie feels **"positive"** about herself; she says that she **"believes"** in herself and in her **"dreams for the future"**. Rosie's mother also described her as having **"changed"** from being very **"shy"** to being someone who is **"confident"** and **"positive"**. Rosie feels that she had a very **"hard time at primary school"**. Since she was very young, she **"struggled to read"** and experienced difficulties with learning and relationships with her teachers. She feels that **"they did not understand"** her. Rosie's mother found it very **"hard to accept that her child was not as bright as other children"**. Out of fear for what people would say, they **"stayed away from their family"** and Rosie also kept to herself. Rosie feels that attending a school of skills **"made a positive difference in her life"**. At first she also felt **"ashamed"** of attending the school, because of what **"other people may think"** about her, but then she saw that there were other children **"like"** her, children who also experience difficulties, and sometimes she had the opportunity to **"help someone else"**, and **"not always be the one that needed help"**. This made her feel good about herself. Rosie also experienced her teachers as **"loving"**, **"caring"** and **"supportive"**. There was one teacher who always encouraged her, and Rosie feels that through this teacher she started to **"believe"** in herself. Rosie felt that what made the difference was that even though other people thought they were **"mad"**, and that they were at a **"mad school"**, they **"understood each other"**. Rosie feels that she is normal, it is just that she learns a bit **"slower"**, but she believes that she **"can do"** what she puts her **"mind"** to. She feels that at the school of skills she had the opportunity to **"work with her hands and learn a skill"**. Rosie's mother is very proud of her, and besides her experience at a school of skills, she believes that the **"influence of religion has played a great role in Rosie's life"**. Rosie's mother is worried though that Rosie does not have **"something behind her name that will open doors for job opportunities"**. Similar to Jack's parents, she feels that there are **"no opportunities"** for her child and she feels that there is a **"lack of guidance and support"** in where to go after the school of skills.*

## Nick\*\*

Nick is 19 years old. He lives with his parents and his sister. Nick sees himself as someone who is still **"enjoying life"**. He believes that he is still **"young"** and that perhaps he will be ready to **"settle down"** and have a **"serious relationship after"** the age of **"25"**. At the moment he has **"friends, cars and girls"** on his mind. Nick describes himself as having a **"short temper"** at times and that is why he likes music icon **"Eminem"**. Eminem sings about his own **"struggles with anger"** and Nick feels like he can **"relate"** to this. According to Nick, **"family is the most important thing in his life"** and he feels that **"the way his parents raised him"** has had a great **"influence"** on who he is today. Nick's mother describes him as someone who is **"caring"** and is **"gentle at heart"**. She also says that he has always enjoyed **"working with his hands"**. He was always the one who **"figured things out"** before they were done reading the **"manual"**. Nick says that failing at primary school made him feel very **"despondent"** and after failing for a **"second"** time he **"did not want to go back to school"**. Nick's mother feels that his teachers at primary school **"didn't care"**, they didn't even pick up that he was struggling with his reading. She was the one who **"discovered"** her son's difficulties and by then it was **"too late"** she says. Nick feels that attending a school of skills **"changed everything"** for him because that school gave him **"another chance"**. At first he felt **"scared to attend the school because people said it's a school for dumb children"**, **"stupid children"**, a school for **"retards"**, but he soon changed his mind when he **"realised"** that **"they didn't really know what was going on"**. Nick feels that going to that school made him feel more **"positive"** about himself. At primary school he says that the teachers always continued even when you struggled to catch up, while at the school of skills he was surprised that the teacher actually **"stopped to help"** those who were struggling. Nick describes one teacher at the school of skills that he says always **"put pressure on him to be a role model"** and to be a **"leader"**. This pressure **"motivated"** him to **"work harder"**. Nick describes how many of his **"friends have dropped out of school"** and how this has motivated him to **"not give up"**. Nick feels that he is **"more focused"** and **"mature"** these days and even though he is **"not doing what he really wants to"** at the moment, he **"believes"** that he will eventually achieve his dream.

## 4.2 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

During the qualitative content analysis, several themes and sub-themes were identified, which were then divided into three categories according to the research sub-questions. These themes can be viewed in Table 4.1 below:

**Table 4.1: Themes identified in the data**

Themes	Categories according to the research questions
1.1. Individual sense of self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personality, parenting and values</li> <li>- Feelings about the future</li> </ul> 1.2. Perception of being 'normal' 1.3. Gender differences in identity formation	1.  Participants' perceptions of their sense of self
2.1. Self-defining memories 2.2. Primary school experiences 2.3. Referral to a school of skills	2.  Participants' perceptions of experiences that had an impact on their sense of identity
3.1. Public forms of evaluation 3.2. Quality of interpersonal experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers</li> <li>- Peers</li> </ul> 3.3. School-related sense of self 3.4. Concerns about vocational possibilities	3.  Participants' perceptions of the role of the school context in shaping their sense of identity

The above themes came from data gathered by means of semi-structured interviews and the researcher's reflexive notes. These data sources are presented in Table 4.2 below. Where data are presented in this section, the source is indicated by means of the codes presented in Table 4.2 below, and data are presented verbatim as indicated in the transcribed interviews with the participants and their parents.

**Table 4.2: Data sources**

Participants	Parents	Transcripts	Researcher's notes
Jack**	PAJack PBJack	1	1
Julie**	PJulie	2	2
Rosie**	PRosie	3	3
Nick**	PNick	4	4
			5
** Names changed for confidentiality purposes JackT1P12 = Jack Transcript 1, Page 12 PNickT4P2 = Parent of Nick, Transcript 4, Page 2			

It is clear from the vignettes above that the findings in this study consist of great variability. This is consistent with the study of Beyers and Goossens (2008), in which they found substantial inter-individual differences in terms of late adolescent individuals' process of identity formation and the influence of parents. Data can therefore not be used as representative of all those who have attended a school of skills, as indicated in Chapter 3. Instead, the data provide one with a glimpse into "real-time situations where identity is at stake ... [and how a few individuals managed] their domain-specific identities" (Bosma & Kunnen, 2008, p. 287).

The findings, which are discussed below, represent a mixture of similarities and differences in individual experiences. For this reason the researcher focused on giving voice to the participants (as indicated in section 3.5.3.2). Data was therefore presented verbatim according to the transcriptions of the interviews held. Quotes presented in Afrikaans were translated and for clarity's sake the researcher added extra information to make the meaning of what was said clearer or when meaning was obscured by the participant's language use. These changes have been indicated with the use of square brackets.

This study has been grounded within Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework of human development and Erikson's psychosocial theory. The findings are presented and subsequently discussed in light of other relevant findings in this chapter, while an

interpretation of the findings according to the research question and in light of Bronfenbrenner and Erikson's theories is provided in Section 5.2. The analysis of the data therefore yielded the following themes:

#### **4.2.1 Participants' perception of their sense of self**

In answering the questions "How do you see yourself?", "How do you think others see you?" and "What are your plans for the future?", the results show that the participants relate their sense of identity to aspects of personality, the influence of parenting, how they feel about their future and their feelings towards having a disability identity, or in the case of this study, not having a disability identity. In addition, although the research did not set out to evaluate gender differences in identity formation, the results appear to be consistent with research findings on this theme.

##### **4.2.1.1 Individual sense of self**

###### *4.2.1.1.1 Personality, parenting and values*

The literature shows that younger adolescents often describe themselves in terms of observable characteristics such as their hair colour or their ability to run fast, while older adolescents describe themselves in terms of abstract concepts such as loyalty or humour (Oswalt & Zupanick, 2013). This finding was consistent among the participants, judging from their descriptions of themselves and the way in which their parents described them, as characteristics such as confidence, respect, positivity and kindness were considered important aspects of one's personality.

*"he is a sweet child, very honest child" (PJackT1P1)*

*"I used to be rude, and I acted like a boy [...] but now I am a quiet person (JulieT2P12)*

*"Sy het a sagte hart, en sy hou van met mense werk" (PJulieT2P12) [She has a soft heart and she enjoys working with people]*

*"I am confident" (JulieT2P13)*

*"She likes to encourage people [...] she is goal-driven, confident and independent" (PJulieT2P1)*

*"She used to be disrespectful, but now she is more obedient" (PJulieT2P1)*

*"Ek staan op vir myself [I stand up for myself] [...] I am independent [...] hopeful [...] determined" (RosieT3P24, 27, 28)*

*"She changed from being shy to being confident" (PRosieT3P1)*

*"Sy is baie positief en trots op haarself" (PRosieT3P3) [She is very positive and proud of herself]*

*"I have a short temper" (NickT4P16)*

*"He is caring [...] has a gentle heart [...] is a player [ladies man]" (PNickT4P4)*

These findings are in line with several researchers that agree that identity development and personality development are mutually reinforcing processes (Klimstra, 2012; McAdams & Olsen, 2010). This is seen in the way the participants have committed to certain positive behaviours, such as caring for others, or beliefs about themselves, such as: "I am confident". According to the literature, these commitments to aspects about oneself reflect a sense of one's identity (Marcia, 1980). An awareness and commitment to one's personality are therefore seen as a reflection of one's identity. This is further evident in the following researcher's note:

*In comparison to the other participants, [Nick] is similarly confident about himself and feels positive about his aspirations for the future, yet he seems to be more engaged in actively working towards his goals, which the literature says is necessary for healthy identity formation (Erikson, 1968). (R4L25)*

The findings further indicated that pertinent to their sense of self, were the things that were important to them, or in other words things that they valued. The findings show that family, friends and religious affiliations were considered very important to the participants. One participant indicated: *"My mother, my father and my dog are very important to me ... he [my dog] will do anything for me"* (JackT1P14). Another participant indicated: *"My family is the most important to me [...] also cars, drags and girls"* (NickT4P15, 19) (drags refer to car racing at the local racetrack).



Several participants also indicated a belief that the way their parents raised them has played the biggest role in who they are today. One participant indicated: *"It's the way they raised me"* (JackT1P14). Another participant said: *"My mother is my role model"* (NickT4P20).

This particular belief was also held by the parents. Several of the parents emphasised that it was the way they raised their children that made the biggest difference. One parent said that parents need to stand behind their children one hundred per cent of the time and that their encouragement plays a big role in how they see themselves:

*"Maar dit hang meestal van die ouers af wat hulle doen met die kinders, as jy vir jou kind 'n doel het dan moet jy jou kind encourage, jy moet 100% agter jou kind staan en as jou kind skool toe gaan dan moet jy jou samewerking gee"* (PJulieT2P8) [*It mainly depends on the support parents give to their children. You need to encourage your child and stand behind them one hundred percent of the time*]

Another parent alluded to the home environment being a place where identity needs to be supported: *"importance [the most important thing] was positive at home when she was experiencing negative at school"* (PRosieT3P2).

The findings therefore show that parents acknowledge their responsibility in their child's development of a healthy sense of identity. This is evident in the parents acknowledging that they are strict parents and that they believe that the way they raised their son played an important role in how he sees himself (PJackT1P17, PNickT4P2). This was further evident in the sense of guilt the parents felt and how they blame themselves for making a decision that they now believe was a big mistake, namely sending their child to a school of skills:

*I sensed a deep regret from Jack's parents. They really do blame themselves, feeling that they have ruined their son's chances. Jack's mom became quite emotional when she spoke about how she blames herself. (R1)*

Another parent described how proud she is of her son, in that his friends are often drinking and smoking and she has observed how he has separated himself from



those friends. She too believes that their strict style of parenting had played a huge role in who he is today (PNickT4P22).

These findings are in line with the literature that indicates a significant link between parenting and identity formation in adolescence (see Section 2.4.1). The findings are in line with the views that authoritative parenting may foster healthy identity formation, when accompanied with warmth and firmness and allowing psychological autonomy (Steinberg, 2001). Bornstein (2009, p. 144) similarly argues that the relationship between the parent and child "robustly influences children, [as] childhood is a particularly plastic period when enduring social skills, personality attributes, and cultural values are inculcated. [...] parents' cognitions and practices influence child development through different paths".

The participants and parents also alluded to the importance of religion and attending church activities in contributing to their child's sense of identity. One parent indicated that her daughter had a love for the church: "*Lief vir kerk*" (PJulieT2P16) [She loves church]; while another parent emphasised that it is the "*Influence of religion*" (PRosieT3P3) that has made a big difference in how her daughter sees herself. It appeared that the church provided a sense of purpose and security, which participants could relate to and integrate into their sense of self:

*Both female participants seem to regard their interaction with the church as most important to them. It appears that their principles and beliefs and the way they feel about themselves are significantly influenced by their religious values. (R3L13)*

This finding relates to research on the role of religious contexts and the process of identity formation. According to Hardy, Pratt, Pancer, Olsen and Lawford (2010, p. 5), "religious contexts are said to not only foster identity formation but are also considered by some as being the most conducive to identity formation". In addition, similar to the findings of King and Boyatzis (2004), it appears that for the participants their involvement with their church communities may have provided a perspective from which to view the world, as it provided them with opportunities to socialise with others and a set of basic principles that they could live out. Adolescents tend to latch

on to these opportunities, as the search for an identity is often seen as a search for meaning.

The way in which the participants describe themselves appears to validate Klimstra's (2012, p. 473) statement that "core traits, internal goals, motivations and life stories [...] mutually influence each other". This is evident in how Julie describes herself as someone who cares for people. Julie's mother confirms this by saying that she has a soft heart and enjoys caring for people. Julie also expressed a desire to further a career in helping people. In this respect, her goals and dreams are influenced by her personality and the experiences she has had.

Within Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, these personality traits can be understood as the characteristics that an individual brings to each social situation, which have a directly impact on one's relations with others, also known as proximal processes (see Section 2.2.7). These characteristics include dispositions, such as Nick's belief that he has a temper, which could influence how he interacts with others; ecological resources, such as Julie's description of herself as helpful; and demand characteristics, such as Rosie's mother pointing out that she used to be very shy, which may have hindered the way she used to interact with others.

The findings within this theme can thus be understood according to the transaction principle, which acknowledges that an individual's characteristics shape his or her experiences, and reciprocally, as will be seen in subsequent themes, that experiences shape the characteristics of the individual through time (Bornstein, 2009, p. 156). It is evident that by means of their characteristics, they actively contribute to their own development. This relates to the lifespan perspective, which asserts that human beings are open systems and that psychological functioning is in fact plastic in nature (Bornstein, 2009).

In addition to their personal traits, influence of parenting and what is valued, their feelings about the future also conveyed how they see themselves.

#### 4.2.1.1.2 *Feelings about the future*

The findings indicate that with the exception of one participant who felt a sense of despondency regarding his future (JackT1), most of the participants feel positive about themselves and in turn feel positive about their futures (R4L36):

*"I feel positive [...] I believe in myself and have dreams for my future"*  
(RosieT3p12)

*"She has big dreams"* (PJulieT2P3)

*"I want to travel the world"* (JulieT2P14)

*"I see myself as a manager one day"* (NickT4P17)

These participants' positive feelings about their future are similar to a national survey on South African youths, which reported on a nationally representative random sample of 2 000 South Africans aged 12 to 17 years. The findings indicated that "young South Africans are overwhelmingly optimistic about the future of South Africa and filled with the usual aspirations and ambitions of youth" (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2013). Steyn et al. (2010) similarly report that the adolescents in their study expressed positive future aspirations.

Erikson (1968) indicated that thinking about and planning for the future is an important development task for adolescents, as cognitions about the future influence current and ongoing behaviour (also see Beal & Crockett, 2010). The findings of this study show that the participants are engaging with this task. The findings also confirm that the stronger adolescents' aspirations are, the more they influence current choices, actions and activities (Beal & Crockett, 2010). This is evident in one participant's motivation to continue in a direction that is not necessarily his first choice, yet he is motivated to do what he needs to in the meanwhile:

*"That was actually my main thing to just to go for cars but then at XXX [post-school training institution] they said the class is full and I thought ok you can put me in welding and I will do that so long"* (NickT4P20)

The findings presented in the above themes appear to validate the findings of Alberts et al. (2003), who indicate that adolescents find family relations, values, religious matters and feelings about the future as most salient to their sense of identity.

As discussed in Section 2.7, learners who attend a school of skills are considered learners with mild intellectual impairment (disability); however, the findings indicated that the participants do not accept a disability identity as part of their sense of self, as discussed in the next theme.

#### **4.2.1.2 Perception of being 'normal'**

According to Erikson (1968), each individual has the desire to be special in some way. However, in terms of semantics, the term *special* has negative connotations in the context of the school of skills as a 'special' school. A consistent finding among the participants was the desire to be seen as 'normal'. They did not see themselves as having a disability. However, the evidence does show that they are aware of their being different, but do not include a disability identity in their sense of self.

Several times during the interview, one participant emphasised this by saying: "*I am normal*" (Jack). Another participant articulated that she did not believe that she has a disability; instead, she said that she is a girl with a normal brain who can do anything a child at a normal school can do:

*"Ek glo daaraan ek het nie 'n disability nie, dis net dat ek is 'n meisie met 'n normale brein en ek kan werk doen wat 'n normale kind by 'n hoërskool doen kan ek doen" (JulieT2P21) [I don't believe that I have a disability. I am a girl with a normal brain and I can do the same thing that a child at a normal high school can do]*

Participant 3 described similar feelings:

*"I don't believe that I'm disabled, because I'm normal, just that I'm slower and that doesn't mean that I have a disability, I just want people must notice me for who I am not say 'Oh shame she has a disability she can't do that she can't that, I can do anything I wanted to, it's just I'm just a little bit slower." (RosieT3P16)*

The researcher noted that the participants appeared to have a need to defend their sense of identity as being normal. This is evident in the following researchers note:

*I felt surprised at how strongly [Rosie] seems to feel about not being disabled. She spoke with such emotion and at one point, I thought I saw tears in her eyes. (R3)*

The notion of having to defend oneself was further validated in the way one of the parents described how her son developed a defensive response:

**PJack:** *At the moment I think he, he sort of sometimes it's not always he would put up a barrier, I don't know how to but it now to you, but it's like almost he gets defensive, to put it so ... that's how I sometimes it's not always, that's how not most of the times but sometimes other times he would be a normal child sort of but I really don't know how to put it.*

**Interviewer:** What do you mean when you say a normal child?

**PJack:** *Like ordinary, like laugh and you known be my Jack, I don't know how you want me to put it now, a normal child like even he is very happy he can be very at times very defensive and I think it is also somehow that's how I see him you know and then I will tell him or so "hi Jack, cool it, count to ten", something but otherwise he is, I see him as a very sweet child, very honest child. (PJackT1P1)*

According to Vohs and Heatherton (2004), it is a natural response to become defensive when one's sense of self is threatened. This can be said of those with and without disabilities. Establishing whether participants have a mild intellectual impairment was, however, not within the scope of this research. In addition, as it will be pointed out in Section 4.3.1.3, none of the participants report ever being formally assessed, therefore it appears that none of the participants possess a formal disability label. This was unexpected in light of the literature review. In addition, in her study on adolescents' perception of their disabilities, Kuffner (2012) found that all the participants in her study had been formally assessed and had integrated their

disability identity into their personal identity; however, she indicates that they did not experience it as debilitating.

In addition, it appears that the participants and their parents construct their understanding of disability in terms of physical disabilities. This is evident in the resistance participants indicated when they were referred to another special school that catered for individuals with visual impairments before they were referred to a school of skills. One participant indicated: *"I was accepted at the school for the blind, but I thought I am not blind and I told my mother that I don't want to be there"* (RosieT3P20). One of the parents also indicated that they had considered that school as an option for their son, but he refused for fear of how others would see him: *"He didn't wanted to go there, he said the children [will] think he is blind"* (PNickT4P3).

Although the 'disability' status of the participants could not be established, it appears that the findings are consistent with research on people with mild intellectual disabilities. The participants' description of themselves can be understood as an action to "challenge and replace historical self images with [a positive one] of their own making" (Arneil, 2009, p. 218), which is evident in the way the participants described themselves and their resistance towards a disability identity. According to Arneil (2009, p. 219), some disability scholars have argued that people with disabilities "have been subject to the insidious power of negative language". In Section 2.6, a brief history was given of how the image of disability has evolved. Arneil (2009, p. 220) notes that common to all these historical images of disability is firstly the understanding that the deficiency is exclusively within the individual, which is measured in relation to others who are seen as 'normal' and secondly, these images are "unrelentingly" negative.

Darling (2013) points out that since the inception of the human rights movement, disability is increasingly being seen as a normal form of human variation similar to gender and race. However, as Darling (2013) asserts, many negative conceptions still exist today. This is further evident in the participants' assertion that they are *not* disabled and in the negative forms of evaluation that they experienced before and during attending a school of skills (see Section 4.3.3.1). Jahoda and Markova (2004, p. 552), in their study on people with mild intellectual disabilities, found that "the majority of the participants rejected a stigmatized view of the self [...] they refused to

accept the negative stereotype of a disabled person as being unable to make choices in their lives". Finlay and Lyons (2000) similarly found that their participants did not talk about themselves in relation to their intellectual disabilities, rather they used downward social comparison, as people often tend to "downplay their weaknesses and emphasize their strengths" (in Johoda, Wilson, Stalker & Cairney, 2010, p 523).

Although gender was not explicitly examined in this study, several issues were highlighted that could be linked to relevant literature on this topic.

#### **4.2.1.3 Gender differences in identity formation**

The literature shows that women are less likely to change commitments and are quicker to develop intimacy (Alberts et al., 2003; Klimstra, Luyckx, Hale, Frinjs, Van Lier & Meeus, 2010). This is possible, as identity formation is not restricted to adolescence. Instead, a woman can have a strong sense of identity and enter a relationship and then later in life that identity may be re-explored. This relates to what Klimstra and colleagues refer to as short-term dynamics of identity formation (Klimstra et al., 2010). In Rosie and Julie's cases, there is evidence of strong attachment to religious values, as indicated in Section 4.2.1.3, and both of them express positive feelings about their future. These findings are consistent with that of Alberts et al. (2003), who found that girls consider future career goals, morals, same-sex friendships and community interaction as more important than boys. According to Marcia's statuses (see Section 2.3.1.2), Julie and Rosie are possibly in the identity achieved category, as they seem to have made strong commitments.

*"I am going to college. I want to prove them [all those who said I cannot make it] wrong." (JulieT2p21)*

*"I want to help people. I want to prove them [my friends who looked down on me] wrong." (RosieT3p14)*

The male participants, on the other hand, spend more time exploring, as we can see with Jack and Nick. Jack chose to take the year off to decide what he should do, while Nick is taking all the time he needs to explore "while he is young". In addition, in considering gender differences. Alberts et al. (2003) also found that boys tend to consider sexual factors and relationships as salient to this sense of identity. This is

evident in the following excerpt from Nick's interview. He describes how he is meeting new girls, but he states that he is not ready for a long-term relationship.

**Nick:** *I don't see myself really in long-term relationships because I'm not ready for that I'm still young, still enjoying my life.*

**Researcher:** *And what does enjoying your life mean for you?*

**Nick:** *Mostly having fun with your friends, they're not really into relationships I don't have time now for problems like that, girls [are] not really on my mind.*

**Researcher:** *Ok, when would you say you will be ready for a relationship? Have you thought about it, when you would be ready for a relationship?*

**Nick:** *Probably after the age of 25 going towards the 30s, more there.*

**Researcher:** *Why would you put it there, what's supposed to be happening in that time of your life?*

**Nick:** *There's a time that you start settling down, not going out, stop with car things around there and I will be into relationships, but not at the moment ... Yes, far later because now is the time that I must enjoy life, life is short and I only live once, also when I am married then all my fun is gone." (NickT4P18)*

The transcription further provides evidence to the contemporary idea that the demarcation of adolescence has shifted to a period that researchers call 'emerging adulthood' (see Section 2.4).

According to Marcia's statuses, Nick is possibly in the moratorium stage of identity formation. In this stage, adolescents continue to explore without having made solid commitments.



#### **4.2.2 Participants' perceptions of experiences that had an impact on their sense of identity**

It was evident in the findings that each participant had unique experiences that had an impact on how they see themselves. This corresponds with the assertions of Mclean and Pasupathi (2012), who state that the new way of looking at identity is to consider how individuals reconstruct the past and thereby make meaning of their current selves.

##### **4.2.2.1 Self-defining memories**

The findings indicated that for most of the participants, 'working with their hands' was strongly constructed into their sense of identity. Not only did several participants indicate it as being a part of how they see themselves, but parents also emphasised it as being an identifying aspect in relation to others. In addition, it also appeared that there was a strong link between the notion of working with one's hands and learners who attended as school of skills.

Pertinent to his sense of identity, one participant emphasised that he has always seen himself as being "handy". In our discussion on significant events in his life, using the timeline (see Section 3.5.3.2.), he indicated:

*"always handiness [...] always handy [...] like people would always ask me like, from small already: "Can he come help me," or such stuff they already like knew, 'ok he can do it' ..." (JackT1P27)*

He went further to describe that among his friends, this same quality made him unique:

*"It's like I was always the one that could do stuff, they like how can I, say now like we still drive bicycle and I would like help them with the bikes and fix the stuff, they will always come to me, ok you do it for me or something like that" (JackT1P27)*

In the following statement it is clear how this participant has accepted being handy as part of his sense of identity: *"It's nice helping people and I like working with my hands"* (JackT1P27). This understanding of himself as being handy was further

established in his experiences of helping his father and his father's friend with odd jobs:

*"Like I will always like till now, I would help my daddy and his friend with part-time jobs. My daddy's friend he is a welder, sometimes I work with him for the day and such stuff and we do maintenance" (JackT1P28)*

One of the parents indicated: *"I think working with his hands is [a] more important part of his life than anything else"* (PNickT4P2). Similar to Jack's description of events in his life, Nick's mother also reports the role he played in their family, further establishing his role as being 'good' with his hands:

*"He always wanted to do things with his hands, for example he would take the remote control totally apart to see what's inside and then put it back together again because he was always good at figuring things out. If we buy a TV or whatever we will sit with a manual and try to figure it out, and by the time we're done then Nick already programmed whatever was supposed to be programmed" (PNickT4P10)*

As indicated above, the findings highlighted a perceived link between 'being good with working with your hands' and the school of skills. One parent described how in her opinion the community hears that children that attend a school of skills work with their hands and therefore they call it a 'mad school' (the occurrence of public forms of evaluation will be further discussed in Section 42.3.1).

*"Dis omdat baie kinders wat daar gegaan het sommige van hulle se breins is nie dieselfde soos die een sinne nie en dit is omdat mense hoor hulle werk met hulle hande, mense gaan eintlik agter hulle gehoor aan maar hulle weet nie wat binne-in aangaan nie, dié wat hulle net kan sê dit is 'n mal skool, maar as jy binne-in gaan kan jy sien wat dit is, dit is nie 'n mal skool nie"* (PJulieT2P9)  
[Many children that attend school there, their brains are not the same as other children. Many people think that because they work with their hands they attend a mad school. People go after what they hear but they don't know what is really going on inside the school]

Another parent articulated similar feelings by pointing out that 'people' tend to associate 'working with your hands' with being dumb.

*"Hier in die gemeenskap, ag man, hulle sê die kinders is dom kinders want hulle kan net werk met hulle hande, hulle sal niks bekom nie"* (PRosieT3P7) [People in the community say that the children are dumb because they work with their hands, that they will never become anything]

Another participant described her experience of caring for her aunt who had been very sick. Her aunt has since died, but she always remembers how she got up in the evening to ask her if she needed anything. It appeared that Julie used the telling of this memory to further establish that she saw herself as a caring person.

*"Ek het 'n auntie geken wat diabetic was en dit was vir my swaar, ek het haar laas jaar, in die jaar het ek haar verloor en dit was vir my swaar. Sy het altyd vir my encourage ... ek was altyd die een wat opgestaan het en gevra "auntie wat mekeer auntie"? want ek was altyd daar om haar te help ..." (JulieT2P14) [I knew an aunty who had diabetes. It was very hard for me when we lost her last year. She always encouraged me ... I was always the one who would get up at night and ask her if anything was wrong because I was always there to help her]*

For another participant, learning to drive changed everything for him. Both he and his mother described how he had been an avid soccer player, but when he started driving, he started thinking about which career path would suit his interests. In the following quotation one can see how a significant experience influenced his actions and similarly his aspirations for the future:

*"At first I wasn't really into cars but it started when I learned how to drive [...] watching my father do work on cars, asking him what is that and what is the meaning for that. I use to take my phone and Google it to find out more about the cars and now I can do most of the things on my own [...] that's why I want to go next year maybe into motor mechanics"* (NickT4P19)

Finding something that he is interested in encouraged active exploration, which many theorists have argued is essential for the process of identity formation. In their

research among 203 college students, Mclean and Thorne (2003) found certain memories experienced with peers or parents served as powerful tools for meaning making and therefore had a self-defining function. These memories are brought to the fore through conversation (Mclean & Thorne, 2003). It can therefore be argued that the research interview itself provided this conversational context in which the participants were able to reflect on and make meaning from these self-defining memories. The findings in this theme further validate the notion that perceptions people have of their past and their future selves (as indicated in Section 4.3.1.3) are related to their perception of their current selves. As Mclean (2003) pointed out, individuals use important events in their life as clues, which they integrate into how they see themselves. This further relates to contemporary literature regarding the change and stability that occur in the process of identity formation over the lifespan of an individual.

#### **4.2.2.2 Primary school experiences**

The findings further indicated consistent accounts of negative primary school experiences. Almost all the participants described feelings of having struggled at primary school, being mocked and excluded and experiencing their teachers as uncaring and non-supportive. The parents voiced similar experiences with their children's teachers and consistently reported reading difficulties as a primary barrier to learning experienced by their children.

One participant said: *"I struggled at primary school [...] I repeated a year also ..."* (JackT1P15). Another participant indicated that after failing at primary school, he did not wish to return to school for fear of being mocked. He said: *"When I failed, everything changed for me, I didn't feel like going to school"* (NickT4P19) and *"at primary school they don't help each other out, they single you out"* (NickT4P25).

References were also made to reading difficulties as the main cause of their learning difficulties. This was evident in the following statements: *"My reading and writing [were] not up to scratch"* (NickT4P19). Another participant articulated that reading was a huge problem for her and that she had in fact developed a fear of reading: *"Lees was 'n groot probleem, ek was bang vir lees"* (RosieT3P1) [*Reading was a big problem for me, I was afraid of reading*].

The parents confirmed reading difficulties and a fear of reading as primary sources of their children's difficulties at primary school. One parent commented: *"At primary school she was shy and scared [...] and she had a fear for reading"* (PJulieT2P4, 5).

The findings further indicated that the participants and their parents found the primary school teachers as unsupportive and void of caring about their children. One participant described how during that time in her life she hated school. She indicated that she often experienced being teased by her peers and she felt that her teachers did not understand her (understand her needs, that is). She further described how being hurt and broken down eventually lead her to try to take her life:

*"Ek het skool gehaat [...] Kinders het my gespot [...] My teachers at primary school didn't understand me [...] Ek was afgekraak en seer gemaak [...] Ek't onttrek, I thought I don't wanna live anymore. [I hated school [...] The children teased me [...] [...] I was broken down and hurt by others [...] I isolated myself] There was a stage in my life that I only wanted to commit suicide and I did try, I was in Grade 7, yes I was in Grade 7, everything just became a lot, a lot, I couldn't handle anything anymore and I drank some pills. I went to hospital, it was a shock for my mother 'cause she thought I was an independent woman and nothing can bring me down but it just got in a lot to me I couldn't take the pain anymore"* (RosieT3P12,13,15)

This participant's mother further noted that she felt her daughter's experience was unfair and cruel and she remembered how her daughter needed constant encouragement during those years: *"onregverdig [unfair]... cruel ... she needed constant encouragement"* (PRosieT3P4). Another parent voiced her frustration at how unsupportive her son's teachers had been. She described how his difficulties had never been brought to her attention until it was too late. She further described how she was the one who discovered her son's difficulties:

*"Teachers were not supportive [...] I picked up my child's problem [...] one day I saw something on TV that helped me understand his behaviour, so I checked his books and discovered he struggled to read [...] One teacher said: 'I don't have time to sit with children's problems [...] another teacher bluntly told me 'I don't have time for this'"* (PNickT4P2, 3, 7)

Yet another parents voiced her feelings, saying that she feels that schools concentrate on the bright children, and ignore those who face difficulties: "*Ek voel die skole konsentreer op bright kinders en dit is onregverdig*" (PRosieT3P11) [I feel the schools concentrate on bright children, and that is unfair].

The researcher also noted that parents experienced a sense of shame and self-blame when discovering their child experienced difficulties. This is evident in the following researcher's notes:

*It was interesting how [Rosie's mother] says that she stayed away from their family because she was afraid that how they would look at her, that is, having a child that had difficulties at school. (R3L23)*

*[Nick's mom] said that at first she blamed herself for her son's difficulties, but then later she realised that she had to accept his differences and not see it in a negative light. (R4L15)*

These findings also relate to Kuffner's (2012) results, which suggested that early education played an important role in the way that participants formed an awareness of their learning difficulties. The findings therefore further corroborate Erikson's (1968) view that identity issues actually start in primary school.

#### **4.2.2.3 Referral to a school of skills**

The data indicated that the participants and their parents had very little knowledge of what a school of skills was. The little that they did know was based on what people said, and in many participants this created a sense of fear for attending the school. The findings further suggest that the participants experienced their referral to a school of skills as a threat to their sense of identity. The parents also reported having certain expectations about the school of skills that remained unfulfilled.

Most of the participants reported not knowing what a school of skills was: "*I didn't know anything about that school [...] I didn't know that the school exists*" (JackT1P20), another participant indicated: "*I was scared to go to that school because people said it is a mad school*" (NickT4P22). Another participant indicated that she too heard it was a school for stupid or mad children: "*Nee, ek het net gedink dit is vir kinders wat dom is, wat mal is*" (RosieT3P17) [No, I thought it was for

children that are dumb, that are mad]. It thus appears that the participants' knowledge of the school and other schools to which children are referred seemed to be primarily dependent on what they had heard from the community.

In addition, parents reported having certain expectations about the school prior to their child's entry. One parent indicated that she thought that the school of skills was similar to what is known as a technical school in South Africa. Although technical schools do focus on practical skills training, their curriculum is strongly academic and in some cases for those showing advanced academic skills, especially in mathematics and science. It therefore appears that the name 'school of skills' can be experienced as misleading. The researcher also noted the parents' lack in knowledge about special schools in general:

*It seems that three out the four participants were referred to [a particular school] but refused to go because of the disability stigma attached to that school. Both Jack and Rosie's parents were shocked when I told them that at that school children actually have the opportunity to complete their schooling at a Grade 12 level and learn a skill. (R5L13)*

Other parents reported having been given false expectations. They explained that it had been said to them by the school that their son would learn a skill that would possibly give him the opportunity to open his own business one day (PJackT1P2). They explained that the idea of their son being able to do something with his hands had attracted them; however, they pointed out that that they had expected more in terms of academic support and qualifications:

*"We had already registered him at high school and they accepted him but then me and his dad spoke and we said well if he can pick up a skill and if he you know, the only thing that we didn't know was that he wouldn't have at least some education, like other than Grade 5 work, or you know Grade 7 at least or Grade 9 or Grade 10, there's a limit till there but at the end of the day he didn't get that there" (PJackT1P3)*

The participants therefore entered the school of skills environment with preconceived notions that had an impact on their feelings, attitudes and, as indicated in the next section, their interactions in the school environment.



#### **4.2.3 Participants' perception of the role that the school context played in shaping their sense of identity**

The school climate is said to be the feelings, attitudes and beliefs elicited by the school context (as indicated in Section 2.5.1). The findings indicated that within this category, the participants reported public forms of evaluation that were negative and which they perceived as stigmatising to their sense of identity. The participants further reported positive and negative interactions with teachers and peers that contributed to their sense of self. In addition, although there was some variation in feelings and experiences, most of the participants reported a positive school-related sense of self that suggested a developing sense of resilience and self-determination. Finally, related to the contribution of the school context to their sense of identity, the participants unanimously felt that they lacked a worthy qualification that could assist them in their school-to-work transition.

##### **4.2.3.1 Public forms of evaluation**

A cross-case analysis of the data made it evident that the participants experienced their school as having a negative personality. The participants all shared an awareness of how the community saw the school and spoke about the school. The effects of this contextual discourse caused the participants to be wary, even fearful, of attending the school. It was further evident that neither the participants nor their parents thought of the school as being for learners with disabilities.

The participants stated that *"people sad it is a mad school"* (JulieT2P20), *"for mad children"* (PRosieT3P9) and *"problem children"* (PRosieT3P6). Another participant shared similar feelings by saying: *"When I started I didn't know what was going on, people said it's a school for the dumb, for stupid children [...] people say you're dumb 'cause you work with your hands"* (NickT4P26). The researcher also noted that all the participants related the word "mad" to the school of skills (R5L17).

The parents expressed similar experiences of hearing much negativity about the school. One parent noted: *"We heard a lot of negativity about the school in the past, but then we thought ok let's go to the interview [and hear what it is about, but] what was told to me and my wife never materialised. I wouldn't call that a school I would*



*call it a daycare centre" (PJackT1P4). This parent later added: "They classify those kids as under-privileged children. If you come out of a gangster area then you are treated like that ... there is no caring for who you are, or what you are ... if you come there then you are classified as a problem child" (PJackT1P6).*

Another parent similarly related what she had heard. It was noted that she seemed uncomfortable or unsure of how to use the words "backward" and "retarded": *"People think you are backward or retarded if you go there...he [son] is just a bit slow" (PNickT4P9). One parent noted their "brains" are simply wired differently: "Hulle breins is anders" (PJulieT2P9), and another mother noted that she felt that the school carried a stigma that had a negative impact on her daughter:*

*"Ek net gedink jo dis 'n jammerte dat daar so min hulp eintlik is vir hulle tipe kinders, hulle sê mos net dis deesdae probleemkinders wat in sulke skole is, ek dink nie dit is probleemkinders nie ... die skool het daardie stigma of die gemeenskap het die stigma dat dit is stout kinders wat daar skoolgaan, dit is moeilik gewees om dit te aanvaar maar eventually kan ek nou sien daar gaan iets van haar word, ek vertrou maar ..."* (PRosieT3P6) [I thought that it is such a shame that there is little help for these type of children, they say that it is just problem children that are in these types of schools [...] the school has a stigma that only naughty children attend that school. At first, it was hard to accept that my child had to attend school there but now I see that something can come of her, I can only hope ...]

The public's views about the school seemed to relate to the observable behaviour of the learners. According to Jack, the community labelled the learners as *"gangsters"* (JackT1P), and *"even the police [thought] you are a problem"* (JackT1P5). During the interview, Jack described how relaxed he has been since leaving school: *"I don't have to worry about children stealing and stuff"* (JackT1P20). He also felt that the discipline was very poor at the school (JackT1P21). One participant made an interesting comment about the learners' behaviour:

*"It's about how the children act [at] the school, there is nothing wrong with them, people told them they dumb so they acted dumb and do dumb things, like throw*

*each other with stones and things like that, they never actually wanted to act mature ... because they believed what people told them" (NickT4P20)*

Nick's assessment, although given in lay terms aligns with psychological theories. Erikson (1968) pointed out that adolescents' fighting for a sense of identity can occur with the spirit of wild animals. This also relates to Mikoylyski (2008), who pointed out that when adolescents are struggling with self-doubt and most likely identity-related issues, they are more likely to behave poorly and validate those negative feelings.

Research by Baldwin and Sinclair (1996, as cited in Voh & Heatherton, 2001) found that individuals with low self-esteem have often been primed with words of failure, therefore they are often more attuned to words of social rejection. This is evident in how the participants described their experiences. They continue to describe that this occurs because individuals become vigilant in terms of how others perceive them and issues of interpersonal inclusion and exclusion.

The findings therefore show that public forms of evaluation can have detrimental effects on adolescents' identity formation. Stoop (2005) similarly found that along with public forms of evaluation, competitiveness also has a negative impact on learners' self-perception, motivation and dignity.

In their research among Dutch adolescents, Klimstra and colleagues found that there is a transactional model between personality traits and problem behaviour (Klimstra, Crocetti, Hale, Fermain and Meeus, 2011). Klimstra (2012) explains that certain personality traits can make adolescents vulnerable to problem behaviour and similarly, in a cyclical fashion, problem behaviour can further cultivate negative personality traits or damage how one is seen by others. The findings therefore corroborate reports from SANASE (2010) and Eksteen (2009) that behavioural difficulties are rife at schools of skills. The researcher also related the findings to her own experience with learners at schools of skills (R5L20).

As the interviews continued, it was noted that most of the participants had found a way to overcome the negative discourse of the community. Nick said: *"I was actually at first scared of that type of school but when I experience it I said aah it's just like normal schools"* (NickT4P23). Rosie reported that at first she did not want to go to the school because of what other people were saying. She described how she cried

and how she told her mother that she did not want to go at all, but that she too had a change in feelings as she experienced being a student at the school:

*"Omdat mense gesê het dit was 'n mal skool wou ek nie [hê] dat mense moet weet waar ek skoolgaan nie [...] ek het like in soms het ek my opgewerk en ek het like in ek het baie gestres, en ek het [...]like in gehuil omdat mense sê dit is 'n mal skool"* (JulieT2P20) [Because people said it is a mad school I did not want people I knew to know where I went to school [...] sometimes I worked myself up, I stressed a lot, and I cried because people said it is a mad school]

The data further indicated that central to the participants' change in attitude towards the school, was the role of their interactions with significant teachers and their peers.

#### **4.2.3.2 Quality of interpersonal experiences**

The participants reported moments with significant teachers that they integrated into their sense of self. The nature of these interactions with their teachers and their peers appeared to help them overcome the negative evaluations of the community and allowed for a sense of solidarity with 'those who were like them'.

##### **4.2.3.2.1 Teachers**

The participants mostly reported an experience with one significant teacher who they felt had encouraged them and who had seen something in them that they had not seen in themselves before:

*"I miss the school because there were so many people I could ask for advice [...] Teachers encouraged me, helped me to see the world differently [...] They saw things in me that I never saw in myself"* (JulieT2P13, 27)

*"My sir put pressure on me to be a leader, a role model ... the pressure helped me"* (NickT4P23)

*"I can say thank you to that school, the teachers played a big role"* (PNickT4P2)

*"Die onderwysers het my opgelig en die kinders was nice [...]"* (RosieT318)  
[The teachers lifted my spirits and the children were nice to me]

Another participant described the contrast between her experience at primary school and her experience at the school of skills. She reported as follows:

*"Ek voel nie spyt nie, ek het baie dinge geleer, baie dinge achieve, ek voel rêrig ek voel nie spyt nie want ek was vir die kinders wat op my level is, was dit my standarde en wat swakker as ek is, ek voel nie meer minderwaardig nie want vir my was dit net enige ding wat ek op primary school gewees daar is nie kinders wat soos ek is nie ek is die enigste ene wat so is maar toe ek daar kom het alles gechange, alles alles het gechange. Ek het different na myself gekyk en ek kon 'n difference in myself sien want die onderwysers het vir my opgelig en die kinders was dieselfde met my soos ek wou ge[had het] hulle moet met my wees maar by die primary school was dit heel anderste gewees"* (RosieT3P18) [I don't feel regretful, I learnt many things, I achieved many things. Really I do not regret (going to that school) because I was with children who were on my level, on my standard, some were even weaker than me. I don't feel worthless anymore because at primary school there were no children like me, I was the only one who was like this, but when I came (to that school) everything changed. I started looking at myself differently and I could see a difference in myself because the teachers uplifted me and the children treated me like I wanted to be treated, but at primary school it very different].

She went further to describe her teachers as:

*"Very loving, caring en supportive, [...] there was one teacher, I really got a love in my heart for her, because she was always the one that [went] the extra mile with me. I know I was not the easiest person in the world to work with, but there was something that teacher saw in me and I tried harder and harder. Before I was very insecure, but because of her I could open myself and talk to her as a friend, as a teacher, and as a mother. Everything I wanted to be she'd be there for me that's why I don't really I don't have regrets to going to that school"* (RosieT318)

Another participant compared his experience at the school of skills with his primary school experience:

*"It felt weird [being at the school of skills], I was used to just going on [without the teacher's help] but there at that school the teacher actually stopped to help you" (NickT4P29)*

As indicated before, not all the participants felt the same. One participant described that he appreciated the exposure he received to learning different skills because *"I like working with my hands"* (JackT1P21); however, it appears that he did not feel safe at the school and felt that discipline was a problem (JackT1P21). In addition, he indicated that he had many negative experiences that contributed to his feelings about having attended the school:

*"I felt unsafe ... there was a lack of discipline ... teachers didn't have respect ... they didn't care ... did not give fair opportunities ... treated like a criminal ... it is a daycare centre ... wasted my years there ... feel like I wasted my time ... felt like a different person at school because I had to put up a front all the time" (JackT1)*

He reported that in his first year at the school, a teacher used corporal punishment on the learners and he expressed that to him this was not right:

*"He [the teacher] would come around and start kicking the children, that's not nice, cause I could [report him] for that cause he's not suppose to do that, like imagine I'm standing in the line here and somebody just kicks you because you are out of the line, I mean you can talk to a person and say this is wrong and not be abusive" (JackT1P22)*

He went further to describe that in that moment he thought: *"If I had something now to hit this sir I would, but I wasn't raised like that, but that's how I felt"* (JackT1P22). The researcher noted that Jack's statement seemed to be strongly aligned with the values he learnt at home:

*[Jack] seemed so angry when he talked about that teacher. It appears that the values his parents instilled in him supported him in not acting out those thoughts and not succumbing to the pressures of the environment as he describes them. (R1L35)*

The findings are consistent with Erikson's (1968) notion that it takes one teacher to make a difference, whether it is a positive difference, as in the case of Julie, Rosie and Nick, or negative, as in Jack's case. In addition, Stoop (2005), in her study on high school adolescents' identity formation and the role of the school context, similarly found that the practices of the teacher are often most salient to identity formation in the school context.

The results therefore show that teachers have the power to influence learners' attitudes and exert control over how learners view the school. The way the teachers react towards the learners is therefore a key element in the process of identity formation. The findings represent the functional meaning of the environment as experienced by the participants; however, experiences are subjective and therefore the environment might not be exactly as described by the participants.

According to Dusek (1987, as cited in Stoop, 2005), teacher's qualities can be considered more important than their academic competence. In Eksteen's (2009) research, the teachers expressed many negative perceptions about the learners and they expressed their frustration at not feeling competent enough to teach them. In light of Dusek's point, one could argue that especially in the context of the school of skills, teachers should perhaps pay more attention to the way they interact with the learners as opposed to their feelings of competence.

Eksteen's participants noted that learners remain disinterested no matter what the influence of teachers; however it appears to be that many learners who attend schools of skills resist, as they are exploring how far they can go (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2007). Teachers should therefore be aware of this and use it as an opportunity to actively engage the learners in thinking about their identity that is who they are and who they want to be. According to Erikson, adolescents often need to test the extremes and this is often experienced by others as defiance and behaviour difficulties.

According to Eccles and Roeser (2011), teacher support and competency are important for maximising learner development. However, one can argue that the findings suggest that one should first pay attention to learners' needs, interests and

abilities, as this should guide the teacher in terms of the content from which the learners will benefit most.

The frustration that teachers experience can also be the result of ignoring individual differences and standardising their expectations. The literature shows that when the teacher expects learners to all understand at the same tempo, the teacher becomes impatient and the learners start to question themselves, which leads to a lowered sense of self and feelings of anger, unhappiness and helplessness. As a result, they are easily marginalised and alienated, which was evident in the participants' experience at their primary schools. The findings are therefore consistent with the notion that the culture of learning and the quality of interactions with teachers have a significant impact on the process of identity formation in adolescents (Faircloth, 2012; Marshall, 2004; Schacter & Rich, 2011; Sinai et al., 2012).

In addition and consistent with the literature, the role of interactions with peers also contributed to the way in which the participants made sense of their identity within the school context.

#### 4.2.3.2.2 *Peers*

The findings indicate that the participants' interactions with their peers provided opportunities for them to explore who they are as individuals. It further provided a sense of belonging and understanding among peers within the school context. It appears that this sense of belonging encouraged participants to become more positive about themselves, especially in light of the sense of inferiority many of them felt after leaving primary school.

One participant indicated: "*I had one close friend; we were like sisters*" (JulieT2P13). Another participant indicated that often when he felt like giving up, his friends would encourage him to come to school and give it one more day (NickT4P22).

For one participant, it was most significant that at primary school, she had always felt misunderstood because she was different, but at the school of skills, she felt that people understood her:

*"At first I was ashamed but then I saw they are like me [...] and we understood each other [...] also to see that I could help someone else meant a lot to me, I was always the one who was dependent on other people [at primary school]"* (RosieT3P15)

Rosie's mother further pointed out that Rosie was much more comfortable with children that were on her level:

*"Sy was meer op haar gemak gewees [met] haar vriende op haar level"* (PRosie p4) [She was more comfortable among friends that were on her level]

The findings underscore the notion that a sense of solidarity with others allows individuals to relate to and identify with one another. In her study among adolescents and their negotiation of race identity, Dawson (2007) similarly found that contexts have an impact on one another in many ways. According to Dawson (2007, p. 470), "at times they are mutually reinforcing and at other times they contest one another. It is within this process of interaction between contexts that opportunities for identity construction arise". The findings further suggest a sense of belonging that developed between the participants and their peers. This corroborates Brechwald and Prinstein's (2011) findings that a sense of belonging plays an important role in developing a sense of self.

Rubin, Bukowski and Parker (2006) found that peers allow opportunities for intimate self-disclosure in the forms of conversation, encouragement and advice. This is evident in Julie's description of having one very close friend whom she considered to be like a sister. Rubin et al. (2006) refer to these opportunities as identity-supporting peer processes. Davis (2012, p. 1528) further stated that "within the context of intimate peer relations, adolescents articulate their sense of themselves and provide each other with feedback on and validations [of how they see themselves]".

According to the literature, another way in which groups form a sense of belonging is the use of upward or downward social comparison. This was evident in the way one of the participants described his group of friends as different to the other learners at the school:



*"We were a bunch that felt the same, we were the normal ones and they were the mad ones" (JackT1P16)*

The researcher also noted:

*[Jack] said that during break he and his friends would sit together and watch the other learners, almost as though they were on an island. I could see in his face that he really did not want to associate with the other children in the school and that he was grateful that he had a few friends that were like him. (R1L18)*

Jack's description of his group of friends as the 'normal' ones relates to the sociology concept of downward social comparison and othering. Downward social comparison is described as a defensive tendency to look at others as worse off as oneself in order to separate oneself and make oneself feel better about one's sense of self and personal situation (Suls, Martin & Wheeler, 2002). Othering is a similar sociological action of seeing others as lower than oneself as a means to boost one's own self-evaluation.

These phenomena occur because adolescents measure themselves against other adolescents in terms of competence, popularity and material possessions (Schunk & Meece, 2005), and the way one is perceived by others also has a self-preserving function (Stoop, 2005). The findings therefore validate Doumen et al.'s (2012) assertion that the quality of one's relations with peers is closely related to identity formation in adolescence. Bester (2007) similarly found that peers could have a bigger influence on development than parents. This is likely because they spend more time with peers.

The findings further suggested that the quality of interactions that occurred in the school context contributed to the participants' school-related sense of self.

#### **4.2.3.3 School-related sense of self**

The way in which participants made meaning of their sense of identity appeared to be overall positive in light of their interactions with significant teachers and the sense of belonging they experienced among their peers. This is evident in the following description:

*"[I realised that] people didn't know what we do there [... and I decided that] people don't determine my future [...] the school gave me a chance to make something of my life" (JulieT2P21, 27)*

Another participant articulated:

*"I had the opportunity to finish school and pick up an extra skill [...] and look where my skill took me now [...] I was able to go one step further [...] Failing twice at primary school opened my eyes [...] it made me say I'm not gonna back down and nothing is going to keep me back [That school] motivated me to go for it, to not slack and lay back, that school gave me another chance to do it again and now I am going further [...] At first I was scared to go there 'cause of what people said but they didn't know what was really going on [...] That school made me positive about myself" (NickT4P21, 22, 23, 27)*

Yet another participant indicated:

*"Omdat mense gesê het dit was n mal skool wou ek nie geh[ad het] dat mense moet weet waar ek skoolgaan nie, maar later op 'n stadium het ek vir myself gesê hoekom gee ek om wat mense sê. [...] en ek het agterna as hulle vir my vra waar gaan ek skool toe het ek vir hulle verduidelik wat ons daar doen" (RosieT3P20) [Because people said it is a mad school I didn't want people to know that I went to school there, but at a later stage I asked myself why should I care what people say [ ...] and later when they asked me what we do at the school I explained to them].*

Parents similarly reported a change in the way their child saw him- or herself:

*"That is a school of success [...] The school changed her" (PJulieT2P1, 9)*

*"She gained confidence at that school" (PRosieT3P10)*

*"I am glad he went there because his skill is something he can fall back onto" (PNickT4P11)*

The findings further indicated that the change in attitude that two participants in particular experienced encouraged them to attempt to change the views of people in their community. One participant said: *"People didn't know what we do there, so I*

*started telling others about the school and I also encouraged them to go to the school"* (JulieT2P21). One of the parents also indicated: *"We encouraged other parents to go to that school because of his experience"* (PNickT4P12). It therefore appears that the participants had the opportunity to become ambassadors for the school.

It is, however, also possible that some learners who attend a school of skills may also have a branded sense of self due to their experiences at the school. One participant indicated: *"People think I am stupid because I went to a school of skills [...] I am classified as a problem child, as mad"* (JackT1P20). The conversation with Jack further indicated that the way he saw himself influenced his actions and decisions after school. He described how he had been given an opportunity to do an internship, but he had turned the opportunity down because he was afraid that they would think he is *"stupid"* (JackT1P25).

The participants' positive sense of identity further appears to relate to Erikson's psychosocial task of industry. According to Erikson (1968), children need to develop a sense of industry, which relates to a feeling that one is competent at doing at least one thing during the childhood phase of development. Not developing this task leads to feelings of inferiority. In addition, as Erikson's theory proposes, developing a sense of industry is important for the next stage of development, which is to develop a sense of identity in the adolescent phase. It therefore appears that participants left their primary schools with feelings of inferiority, but the school of skills provided them with an opportunity to learn a skill, which supported the development of a sense of industry and consequently lead to opportunities for identity formation.

However, the literature also shows that answering the question: Where am I going? is also pertinent to developing a healthy sense of identity. The findings suggest that the participants feel unsure of their next steps, as the school did not provide them with a worthwhile qualification to support them in their school-to-work transition.

#### **4.2.3.4 Concerns about vocational possibilities**

Finding a place in society is a central concern for adolescents (Erikson; 1968; Stoop, 2005). Therefore, during this period they tend to establish patterns for their lives

around essential questions of who they will be, how they will run their lives and how they will interact with others. In line with these notions, the participants expressed a lack of a worthwhile qualification and vocational possibilities to support their sense of identity:

*"You are nothing without an education [...] I feel like I have to start over [...] I will get nowhere with what I have now [...] I have nothing behind my name [...] I'll only get a job through connections [...] I liked learning a skill, but what now?" (JackT2P2, 20)*

*"There are no opportunities" (RosieT2Pp5)*

*"You don't get like a matric certificate" (JulieT2P14)*

The parents expressed similar feelings of not being sure of the possibilities for their children's future:

*"We should have rather sent him to a normal school" (PJackT1P10)*

*"They need something behind their name to fall back on [...] feels like there [are] only closed doors for them. I feel that the education department has failed our children [...] Where to now?" (PRosieT3P6, 11)*

These findings relate to Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses and Seeking's (2010) review of what it is like for youths growing up in South Africa. These authors point out that the consequence of the old system and inequality in skills and qualifications still have an impact on youths today. This is distressing, as it appears that South Africa spends more money on education than most countries in Africa, and yet "inequality in schooling persists, and the system fails to enable many, or perhaps even most, children to realise their potential (Bray et al., 2010, p. 171). This influences individual as well as social outcomes because the labour market offers few opportunities for unskilled workers (Bray et al., 2010). An aspect that confounds this dilemma is that the Grade 12 examination continues to be the only measure of the quality of education in South Africa (Bray et al., 2010), and according to unemployment statistics in South Africa, even youths with Grade 12 certificates form a large section of the unemployed in South Africa (Allais, 2012). Allais (2012) further points out that

the inflexible market in South Africa appears to be the leading cause of unemployment.

In addition, the findings relate to what has been reported on an international level with regard to career opportunities for young people exiting vocational schools. As indicated in Section 2.7, it is likely that many young people exiting vocational schools may experience high rates of unemployment and a lack in work experience and job training after school (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Piopiunik & Ryan, 2012).

It therefore appears that, given today's rapid development in technology, global economy and emphasis on academic qualifications, Erikson's notion of identity crisis is more common than when Erikson first formulated his theory.

### **4.3 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the results of the study were presented and discussed within the conceptual framework and relevant literature on the themes that were highlighted. In the following chapter, the implications of the findings are discussed, along with recommendations and suggestions for future research. Lastly, the researcher provides a concluding reflection on the research process.

## Chapter 5

# INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to explore the beliefs, attitudes and feelings of adolescents who have attended a school of skills with regard to their sense of self as individuals. The aim was further to explore how the adolescents made meaning of their school context as a contributor to their personal sense of self. The literature on the subject of understanding the processes of identity formation in the school context and specifically in the context of schools of skills is rare. This study therefore sought to answer the question:

How do adolescents who have attended a school of skills perceive their identity?

This entailed exploring:

How do they see themselves?

What experiences have shaped the way they see themselves?

How do they perceive the school of skills contributed to shaping their sense of identity?

This chapter therefore synthesises the empirical findings to answer the study's research questions. In addition, it provides recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research, followed by a concluding reflection.

## 5.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focused on two main theories, namely Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory and Erikson's psychosocial theory, in understanding the process of identity formation and the role of the school context in the identity-formation process. Bronfenbrenner's theory conceptualised the role of the social context in which individuals develop, the various systems that can possibly influence their development and the developmental outcomes such as identity formation. Erikson's theory complements Bronfenbrenner's work by explaining that development occurs in certain stages and in providing an understanding of the major changes that can occur in an individual's socio-emotional development, of which identity formation forms part.

An analysis of the findings yielded important themes pertaining to how the participants perceived their identity. The findings indicate that the participants' perceptions of their sense of identity changed over time - specifically from the time they left their primary schools to where they are at the time of the study, after having attended a school of skills. This relates to modern theories that emphasise that identity formation is not specifically demarcated to the period of adolescence (Klimstra et al., 2010) and that there are elements of change and stability in the formation of an identity.

The participants themselves described how they changed from being shy and quiet to being more confident and feeling positive about themselves. Their parents similarly reported having witnessed a change in their child, especially in relation to an increase in respect and independence. As indicated in Section 4.2.1.1.2, the participants similarly reported positive feelings towards their futures and the researcher sensed the participants' excitement in reporting these feelings (R5L20). As discussed in Section 2.3.1.5, Schwartz (2011) provided an operational definition that relates to these findings in indicating that one's identity consists of a commitment to personal characteristics, beliefs about oneself and dreams and goals.

Regarding the participants' beliefs about themselves, the findings further indicated a sense of resistance to the thought of having a disability. It appeared as though they did not perceive this as part of their sense of identity (as discussed in Section

4.2.1.2). The findings suggest that the participants constructed their understanding of what it means to have a disability on the presence of a physical disability such as a visual impairment (R5L33), which is evident in the way several participants refused to go to the school of the blind (RosieT2P20; PNickT4P3). This appeared to be mainly because of a lack of information, because when the researcher explained that one could obtain a Grade 12 certificate at the school for the blind and that people with and without a visual impairment can attend the school, both the participants and their parents were shocked (R5L22). It therefore appears that both the participants' perception of the community's views and their own knowledge of what a disability is are greatly misinformed and influenced by cultural historical conceptualisation of disability, as discussed in Section 4.2.1.2.

This study further set out to explore the contribution that the school of skills had to the participants' perceptions of their identities. The findings indicate that the participants made meaning of their experiences at a school of skills in contrast to their experiences at primary school. In addition, it was discovered that the participants faced significant negative perceptions about the school of skills, but that their experiences with significant others within the school context mitigated these negative public evaluations in such a way that they were able to experience a sense of belonging. They were also given opportunities to explore alternative roles, which forms part of the identity-formation process (Erikson, 1968).

Regarding their experiences at primary school, the participants consistently reported having experienced failure (JackT1P15; JulieT2P17; RosieT3P13; NickT4P19). This was evident in the awareness shown at having "struggled" and not being able to "cope". All the participants also reported having had difficulties with reading particularly, and some participants expressed sad feelings regarding their memories from primary school experiences (PJackT1P4; RosieT2P1; NickT4P19). Both the participants and their parents also described certain primary school teachers as having been unsupportive and uncaring. This was especially evident in one participant's expression that the teachers did not "understand" her, which can be interpreted as they did not understand her learning needs (RosieT3P12).

As indicated in Section 2.3.1.1, the process of identity formation can be tracked through all the stages of development (Erikson, 1968). Therefore, the participants'



experiences at their primary schools can be related to the industry stage where schoolchildren should develop a sense of doing at least one activity well that is deemed worthwhile to their peers and teachers (Erikson, 1968). Erikson further points out that negative outcomes during this stage can have adverse effects such as a low self-image and a sense of inferiority, which is evident in the sense of despondency the researcher perceived (R5L35) when the participants described their experiences at primary school and consequently their referral to a school of skills (sections 4.2.2.2 and 4.2.2.3). It therefore appeared that the participants had constructed an inferior sense of self based on their experiences of failure and unsupportive teachers. One can therefore argue that their progression to the next stage of adolescence, where an identity crisis needs to be resolved, was stunted.

In addition, it appears that the participants initially experienced shame, fear and a sense of resistance to attending a school of skills because of the community's negative views about such a school. As indicated in Section 2.3.1.2, Marcia (1980) noted that individuals with a foreclosed identity status, which refers to those who have made commitments without sufficient exploration, presented with self-esteems that were vulnerable to negative evaluations from others. The participants' identity statuses were not measured in this study, yet the findings suggest that they entered the school of skills with lowered self-esteems.

The community's evaluations of the school as a "mad" school for "mad" children, as perceived by the participants, seems to relate to the way the learners behaved at the school (as reported by Jack and Nick). An alternative explanation for the community referring to the school as a "mad" school can also relate to the historical connection between disability and the irrational 'other' (Arneil, 2009). In the past, people with disabilities were institutionalised, and seen as 'mad' or 'irrational', or linked to some form of psychopathology (Arneil, 2009). It can therefore be said that many people are not aware of how the understanding of disabilities has changed. It therefore appears as though contemporary conceptualisations of disability (see Section 2.6) have not integrated into normal knowledge systems of South African communities, especially those from disadvantaged communities.

However, it did not appear as though the participants had internalised the views of the community. In contrast, the evidence shows that the participants later realised

that the community was misinformed about their views about the learners who attended the school and about activities that occurred at the school. Several of the participants indicated that 'they' (the community members) did not know what happens at the school of skills (JulieT2P21; NickT4P23). Most of the participants described a sense of thankfulness and appreciation for having attended such a school (JulieT2P27; RosieT3P20; NickT4P27). This is especially evident in one participant indicating that the school of skills gave him "another chance in life" (NickT4P22) and yet another participant indicating that attending the school of skills was the "best thing" that happened to her (JulieT3P20).

Furthermore, several of the participants expressed having had opportunities to help others or act in leadership positions while being encouraged by a significant teacher. As indicated earlier in this section, the task of industry is developed when one engages in a task that one feels competent to do and that is recognised by others as being worthwhile. It is therefore evident that the school of skills provided an opportunity for the participants to develop this psychosocial task through developing a skill. It further appeared that having a newfound sense of competency gave most of the participants a sense of confidence to act out these leadership roles, encouraged by significant teachers, and internalise the beliefs that these teachers seem to have about them (RosieT2P18; JulieT3P27). This sense of confidence therefore encouraged the participants to explore alternative roles, which is part of the identity-formation process (Erikson, 1968). These findings therefore seem to concur with that of Erikson (1968) that completion of one stage sets the foundation for developing the next psychosocial task.

Furthermore, key to the identity-formation process is being recognised "by those who count" (Erikson, 1968, p. 165). In light of this, the participants reported experiencing a sense of belonging among their peers at the school of skills. According to the literature discussed in Section 2.3.1.1, it is developmentally appropriate for adolescents to shift dependence from their parents to their peers (Côté & Levine, 2002; Kroger, 2007). The findings also suggest that the participants experienced having had an equal opportunity to compete with their peers academically, where they had previously only experienced failure (JackT1P15; RosieT2P15, JulieT3P4; NickT4P22). In this way, they were given the opportunity to help others, which they

also compared to previous experiences of having always needed to be helped (RosieT3P15). This action of the participants to make sense of how they perceived their sense of self in comparing their experiences relates to the concept of an *internalised storied reconstruction* (McAdams & Cox, 2010) which involves considering past and future experiences in making sense of one's identity.

Consistent with other research findings, as indicated in Section 4.2.3.2, the quality of interactions between peers, especially teachers, appeared to be the main contributing factor to the participants' sense of identity (Schachter & Rich, 2011). Most of the participants reported at least one significant experience with a teacher who had encouraged them and showed care. This was particularly evident in how three participants alluded to how their beliefs about themselves changed during their interactions with a significant teacher. One participant articulated that her teacher's belief in her encouraged her to believe in herself (JulieT2P13). It therefore appears that these participants internalised the views that their significant teachers had of them. It further appears that these participants were able to overcome the negative evaluations of others. These findings confirm the notion that contextual discourse outside the school can often be filtered through interaction with smaller groups within the school (Darling, 2013), such as the classroom or peer groups. The action of paying more attention to those whom one considers a significant other, which the participants eventually did, was consistent with other research (Darling, 2013). This study therefore emphasised that the quality of relations with peers and teachers and the within-context discourse have the power to be more significant than negative public forms of evaluation.

In line with Erikson and Bronfenbrenner's theories, the findings therefore make it evident that the participants made meaning of their sense of identity on an intrapersonal level or psychological level, as indicated by Erikson (1968), as well as in response to others and in interaction with significant others (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Erikson, 1968). The participants' interaction with making meaning of their sense of self further relates to the contemporary view of identity, which maintains that individuals are becoming more self-reflexive in deciding which aspects of their identity they wish to keep and which to reject. The findings further indicate that based on the way in which the participants' sense of identity

changed over time, it can be said that such identity is indeed not regarded as a fixed entity; instead it is constantly influenced by the commitments one makes and by the response of others.

Furthermore, as indicated in Section 2.4.1, Penuel and Wertsch (1995) noted that Erikson's theory has often been criticised for putting too much emphasis on the intrapersonal action of forming a sense of identity, and for not giving enough attention to the social and cultural factors that many say have a more powerful impact on one's sense of identity. However, one can argue that this study validates Erikson's theory in that the participants made sense of their identity in response to many social factors such as their upbringing, religious affiliations and interaction with unsupportive teachers or caring teachers, as well as their peers. It further appears that the participants made the final decision on which aspects they would integrate into their sense of self and which aspects they would discard. In other words, it appeared that this decision-making process was central to the way in which the participants individually constructed a sense of identity

For most of the participants it appeared that they constructed a positive sense of self in relation to their experiences at a school of skills. However, one participant reported a very different version of the story (in Section 2.3.1.5, an individual's perception of experiences is described as a unique version of the story). Jack describes himself as a "no one" with "nothing behind his name". Jack similarly reported having experienced difficulties at primary school; however, it appears that he and his parents were given false expectations and they therefore expressed feelings of regret regarding Jack's attendance at a school of skills.

One significant difference appears to be that Jack saw himself as 'normal' and different to the others in the school, while the other participants seemed to have accepted their place in the school and experienced a sense of belonging among their peers. This, one could argue, made them more receptive to experiences that the school offered, while it appears that Jack may have closed himself off. On the other hand, one can argue that his negative experiences with his teachers, feeling that he was not given a fair chance to pursue a skill that he was interested in and perhaps feeling that learning opportunities were not worthwhile (R1L24) may also have caused him to close himself off to all other opportunities.

Another reason could possibly be the influence of intrapersonal aspects such as personality characteristics or attitude. As Bronfenbrenner points out (see Section 2.2.7), each individual has dispositions, ecological resources and demand characteristics that have an impact on how one interacts with the environment. The other participants all alluded to being caring individuals that liked to help people. These person factors may have supported their integration into the school context, as the findings indicate that they were given opportunities to be caring, as indicated earlier in this section. This interaction between person factors and the environment relates to both Erikson and Bronfenbrenner's theories, which highlight the importance of the interaction between individual and social factors. In addition, these findings emphasise the reciprocal relationship that exists between micro systems as they interact on a daily basis.

It was further discovered that all the participants and their parents expressed concerns for the vocational possibilities that are available to their children. It appeared that they lacked knowledge of various career articulations and Jack particularly expressed a feeling of severe despondency, as he felt that he did not have any worthwhile qualification. This finding relates to Erikson's notion that not settling on an occupation identity can be the most disturbing experience for adolescents (Erikson, 1968). As Jack noted: "You are a nothing" [without a job]. Erikson goes further to explain that the choice of an occupation actually goes further than the benefits of remuneration and status. Essentially it is about "the immediate contribution of the school age to a sense of identity [that] can be expressed in the words 'I am what I can make work'" (Erikson, 1968, p. 127). The findings therefore substantiate that being able to choose an occupation and do something meaningful with one's life is central to an adolescent's sense of identity.

In line with the findings of Soudien (2001) and Dawson (2007), the findings of the present study indicate that the school context, especially the climate and the culture of the school, is indeed an active agent in the process of adolescent identity formation. This is evident in the way the participants made meaning of their experiences both at their primary schools and at the school of skills. It was further made evident that consistent with other research findings, the quality of the

interactions that participants experienced directly shaped their feelings, attitudes and beliefs about themselves and the school.

According to the bio-ecological model, the findings underscore the power of proximal processes, which are those day-to-day interactions that have an impact on development, and in the case of this study, the process of identity formation. The findings further highlight how the psychological and contextual factors work together as participants made sense of how they see themselves and which experiences contributed to the way they see themselves. Figure 5.1 below provides a visual representation of a summary of the findings in this study.

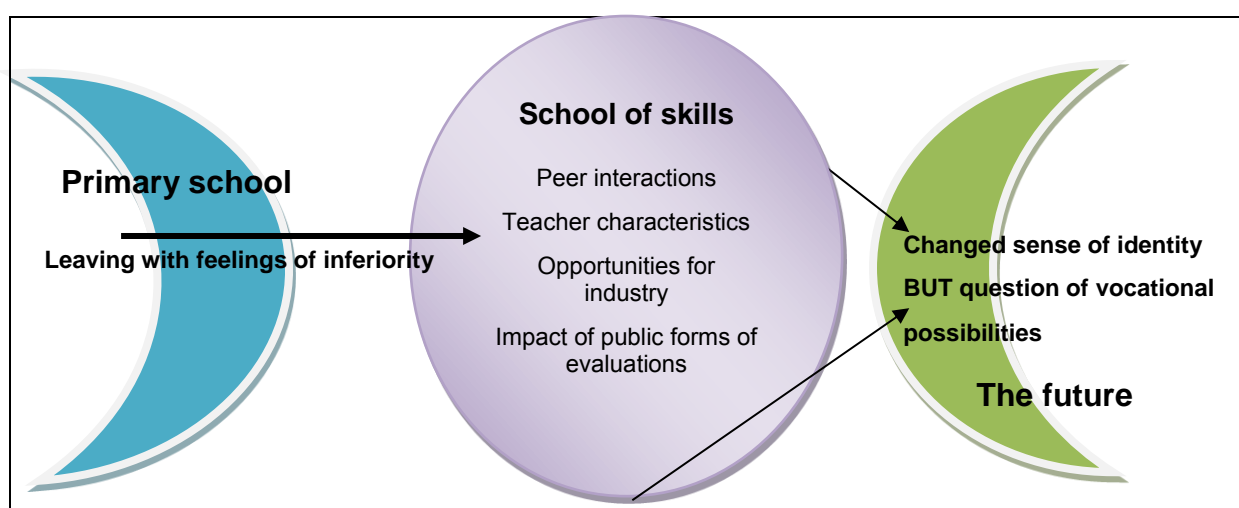


Figure 5.1: Summary of findings

According to the Interprovincial Planning Committee (SANASE, 2010), attempts are being made to providing a specialised curriculum for the school of skills. The document further indicates that the envisaged learner exiting the school of skills system should (SANASE, 2010, p. 7):

- be a lifelong learner;
- be confident, independent, literate, numerate, multiskilled and compassionate;
- have respect for the environment;
- participate in society as a critical and active citizen;
- have the means and vocational and entrepreneurial skills to gain access to the formal and the informal economic sector;

- be a self-confident learner who will participate in social and working life; and
- be a self-reliant individual who can live, work and integrate into normal labour environments.

In considering the learner that is envisaged and the findings, which suggest a lack of vocational possibilities and a sense of a viable identity among the participants, it can be argued that certain identity-related goals should be added to this curriculum and special attention should be given to increasing the awareness of schools of skills in general. The following recommendations are made in this regard.

## **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.3.1 Teacher development**

The findings reveal that within the school context, the quality of interactions with peers and teachers are deemed by the participants as strong contributors to their sense of identity. As indicated in Section 4.3.3.2.1, teachers at schools of skills should become aware of their influence on how learners see themselves. Donald et al. (2010) point out that teachers need to be aware of the complexities that adolescents are going through in their search for an identity. These authors argue that this understanding should encourage teachers to be more patient, tolerant and aware of themselves as powerful role models. In this way, teachers will hopefully be motivated to "listen and respond with empathy and seriousness to the deep, searching questions that, if [one allows] the space for them, adolescents will ask" (Donald et al., 2010, p. 62).

### **5.3.2 An expanded curriculum that includes identity-related outcomes**

Firstly, it is recommended that the curriculum for schools of skills should include broad aims that focus on identity-promoting activities for adolescents. Stoop (2005, p. 179) refers to an 'identity enhancing curriculum', which is aimed at "[promoting] self-acceptance and positive feedback from teachers". In addition, Stoop argues that this dimension of the curriculum should promote exploration, responsible choices and self-determination and encourage a sense of personal control. Teachers can

therefore use this curriculum to encourage hope in the future and a sense of optimism by starting with what they know and familiar contexts (Stoop, 2005).

Secondly, the school context should provide opportunities that are sensitive to adolescence developmental tasks. This can be done through emphasis on extramural activities, which research has proven is essential for healthy development (Meece & Eccles, 2010). Extramural activities provide constructive activities that allow learners to reflect on their identity. According to Meece and Eccles (2010), it is an opportunity for learners to express who they are. One can argue that in an environment such as schools of skills, where the focus is less on academic achievement, these schools would be wise to focus on spending more time and energy on activities that can allow adolescents these opportunities.

Thirdly, teachers should provide opportunities that promote active engagement in real-life experiences that they can incorporate into their understanding of themselves (Stoop, 2005). A good example of this is the teacher's actions in the film *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese, 2007). In the film, the teacher integrates a literature study of the story of Anne Frank with real-life experiences that the adolescents could relate to, such as their experiences with segregation and racism. These activities, which boost a sense of self-efficacy, are salient to identity formation and should be incorporated into the school context. As Barber, Stone and Eccles (2010, p. 370) point out: "the opportunity to express and refine one's identity is a key aspect of socio-emotional development during adolescence and active participation offers a meaningful and constructive domain for such work".

Some might argue that these aspects are already incorporated through the Life Orientation learning area. However, it can also be argued that these aspects should not be exclusive to Life Orientation; instead, opportunities to form a sense of identity should be filtered into every area of school life. This is in line with the inclusive philosophy that calls for a change in attitude and personal philosophy of schools. This further supports the idea of a hidden curriculum "which is about inclusive values, attitudes, beliefs and the capacity of teachers to be reflective in their teaching" (Vayrynen, 2004, as cited in Pather, 2011 p. 1107).



### **5.3.3 An increase in awareness of schools of skills**

The findings indicate that the participants and their parents had very little knowledge of what a school of skills was before the child's referral to the school. The little knowledge that they did have was primarily based on the perceptions of the community. Therefore, it is recommended that special efforts be made to increase an awareness of schools of skills. This could include special efforts by the relevant district departments to promote and campaign schools of skills in a positive light. In addition, it can include sustained and positive involvement of the schools of skills with the community. This can be in the form of open days or market days, where the community can purchase items that the learners have made.

Although not related to the process of identity formation *per se*, the researcher feels that it should be noted that the referral process to schools of skills may also need to be revisited, as the findings revealed that none of the participants were formally assessed before being referred to the school of skills (see Section 4.2.2.3). This may have contributed to the sense of confusion and lack of information, which is evident in the way the participants experienced their primary to school of skills transition. Another way in which information can be conveyed and misconceptions dispelled is the possible use of intake interviews with a counsellor, during which expectations can be discussed with the learners who have been referred to the school of skills.

### **5.3.4 Increased support for school-to-work transition**

The findings indicated that although most of the participants perceived that the school of skills had a positive impact on how they see themselves, the participants and their parents indicated concerns regarding vocational possibilities available to them. According to Ryan (2003), the concern for vocational possibilities is a shared dilemma internationally. However, countries such as Germany have attempted to overcome this challenge by offering a dual system in which mainstream schools offer both academic and vocational routes (Piopiunik & Ryan, 2012). Another option that seems to have had great success for some vocational schools is including apprenticeship programmes during the learners' last year at the school (Piopiunik & Ryan, 2012). For this to occur in the South African context, it would require that businesses make themselves available and that a good relationship exists between

the school and the business. It is therefore recommended that the district departments become proactive in supporting schools in improving their identity as a school system and fostering these types of relationships.

According to Allais (2012), the face of VE on a tertiary level is improving in South Africa. These opportunities include college institutions, learnership opportunities and skills programmes. It is therefore necessary that learners who attend schools of skills are made aware of their opportunities. This can be done through career counselling and guidance and a close partnership between parents and the school system.

## **5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Given that this study has obtained data from only a small sample, a research study that involves a larger sample may generate richer data.

In addition, this study was retrospective in nature and was constrained by time and resources. Future studies that involve direct observation of in-context interactions between educators and peers may yield a deeper understanding of how adolescents make meaning of their experiences in relation to their sense of identity.

Research questions that may provide more insight into the process of identity formation in adolescents who have attended a school of skills are:

- How can the identity of schools of skills be improved?
- Which leisure activities promote identity formation in adolescents who have attended a school of skills?

Research questions that can further provide insight into how the school of skills as a system can be better equipped to cultivate the 'envisaged' learner include:

- What do mainstream teachers know about the schools of skills?
- How are learners referred to a school of skills? How can this process be improved?
- How can educators, parents and school counsellors support learners from schools of skills in their school-to-work transition?

The study was also limited by its geographical setting of one suburb in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Therefore, the study does not investigate parents' experiences from other areas within the province or other provinces throughout the country. As is characteristic of a phenomenological study, the results should not be generalised, but may in future be transferable to investigating the experiences of participants from other areas or other provinces.

## **5.5 CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

Overall, the findings corroborate that "[i]dentity is a sense of who one is and what one's place is in the world" (Donald et al., 2010, p. 63).

It was particularly evident in the study that the participants made meaning in different ways, as the researcher expected in the light of the literature, which describes the process of identity formation as a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon. Initially, the researcher suspected that the participants would consistently report a negative sense of self because of the impact of how others viewed them, especially with regard to the stigmatised identity of schools of skills. However, the results show that in the case of most of the participants, protective factors such as experiencing a sense of belonging among one's friends and having even just one teacher offering words of encouragement can mitigate the effects of negative labelling.

The findings cannot be generalised to all adolescents who have attended a school of skills; however, they do provide insight into how the process of identity formation can possibly occur in adolescents who attend a school of skills and ways in which identity formation can be fostered by teachers, parents and peers.

Above all else, it is hoped that the readers will be encouraged to become identity agents in whichever context they are, as it is arguable that the future depends on adolescents' knowledge of who they are and on them becoming meaningful citizens in South Africa.

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# Appendix A

## Ethical clearance



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### Approval Notice Response to Modifications- (New Application)

12-Jun-2013  
Mack, Carmelita C  
Victoria Street  
Stellenbosch  
Stellenbosch, WC

**Proposal #: HS906/2013**

**Title: Exploring Identity Formation in Adolescents who have attended a School of Skills**

Dear Ms Carmelita Mack,

Your **Response to Modifications - (New Application)** received on **29-May-2013**, was reviewed by members of the **Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)** via Expedited review procedures on **06-Jun-2013** and was approved.  
Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **06-Jun-2013 -05-Jun-2014**

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (HS906/2013)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218839027.

#### Included Documents:

- Consent forms
- Research proposal
- REC Application
- Revised DESC form
- Revised Interview forms
- revised REC Application
- DESC form
- letter
- Revised research proposal
- revised Informed consent form
- revised Questionnaire
- Interview guide

Sincerely,

Susara Oberholzer  
REC Coordinator  
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

## Investigator Responsibilities

### Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

1. Conducting the Research. You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.

2. Participant Enrollment. You may not recruit or enroll participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use. If you need to recruit more participants than was noted in your REC approval letter, you must submit an amendment requesting an increase in the number of participants.

3. Informed Consent. You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.

4. Continuing Review. The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the continuing review report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrollment, and contact the REC office immediately.

5. Amendments and Changes. If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, number of participants, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You **may not initiate** any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

6. Adverse or Unanticipated Events. Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouch within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the REC's requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.

7. Research Record Keeping. You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC.

8. Provision of Counselling or emergency support. When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

9. Final reports. When you have completed (no further participant enrollment, interactions, interventions or data analysis) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.

10. On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits. If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

# Appendix B

## PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM



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**Stellenbosch University**

**Consent to participate in research**

**CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS (older than 18 years)**

**Title of the research project:** Exploring identity formation in adolescents who have attended a school of skills

**Researcher:** Carmelita (Mack) Jacobs

**Contact numbers:** .....

Dear prospective participant

You are hereby requested to participate in a research study conducted by Carmelita (Mack) Jacobs (MEdPsych) from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University as part of the requirements in completing a master's thesis in Educational Psychology.

You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because of your attendance at a school of skills.

Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please feel free to ask any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied and that you clearly understand what this research entails and what may be expected of you.

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore the subjective beliefs and experiences of adolescents who have attended a school of skills. The focus will be on how you perceive your identity formation, in other words how you see yourself and your future. The role that the school of skills played in shaping your identity will also be explored. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will offer an insight into the invaluable worldview of the individual, and that it will inform parents, educators and counsellors to improve practices that lead to identity formation in adolescence.

## 2. PROCEDURES

If you consent to participate in this study, I would request the following:

- Participation in a background information interview: Participant and parent(s) (45-60 minutes)

An initial meeting, if possible, with the family to introduce the study and answer any questions any family member may have.

- Participation in a personal interviews (45-60 minutes): Participants; more than one appointment may be necessary; arranged at a convenient time and venue. (Please note that interviews will be audio recorded, and then transcribed as raw data that will serve as the evidence in this study.)

## 3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Because you will be required to share personal information, it may occur that you may or may not experience discomfort due to certain memories or experiences. Counselling opportunities will be made available to you should it become necessary during the course of this study. Please note that you have the right to refuse any questions that may cause discomfort and that you may refuse to participate in the study at any point.

In the case that a referral needs to be made to a psychologist, XXXX, a psychologist practicing in the Bellville and Kraaifontein areas, agreed to avail herself. Contact details: XXXXX

## 4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

There are no expected benefits to subjects, though it is hoped that the content of the interviews will inform the thoughts and understandings of parents, educators, counsellors and community members regarding contextual factors and their impact on the formation of one's identity. In this way educators and counsellors will be empowered to more effectively contribute to the development of a positive sense of identity in learners with whom they work.

## 5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No remuneration will be provided for the participation in the study.

## 6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be used to identify you as a participant will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms. Furthermore, access to raw data containing identifying information will only be accessed by the researcher.

Transcriptions of interviews as well as the video/audio recordings of interviews will only be accessed by the researcher and securely stored after completion of the research study. No names of identifying information will be used in presenting the thesis.

## 7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose to participate in this study or not. If you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Furthermore, you may also

refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher further reserves the right to ask you to withdraw from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## **8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher:

Carmelita (Mack) Jacobs (..... or [carmelita.mack@gmail.com](mailto:carmelita.mack@gmail.com))

or Mrs L Collair (student supervisor at Stellenbosch University: 021 808 2304 or [lyncol@sun.ac.za](mailto:lyncol@sun.ac.za)).

## **9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You will have the right to listen to recordings of interviews and view transcribed information pertaining to your own interview. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché ([mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622) at the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University.

## **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT**

---



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### Participant consent form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby volunteer to take part in the research study: *Exploring identity formation in adolescents who have attended a school of skills*. The purpose of the study has been explained to me in English or it was satisfactorily translated to me; I understand that I will need to provide personal details, thoughts, experiences, feelings and memories.

I know that the researcher will tape record and keep notes of the interview sessions. I also know that all information, as well as my own, are kept secret. I have also given my permission that the notes and tape recordings may be discussed with the supervisor of the study. I also understand that my contributions will be respected by the researcher and the supervisor.

I have put my name on this paper to show that I agree to take part in the individual interviewing sessions.

Participant's name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

### Declaration by researcher

I declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to .....
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above

Researcher's name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_



# Appendix C

## PARENT CONSENT FORM



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### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

---

#### CONSENT FORM: PARENTS

#### **Title of the research project:**

Exploring identity formation in adolescents who have attended a school of skills

**Researcher:** Carmelita (Mack) Jacobs

**Contact numbers:** .....

Dear Parent (Guardian)

You are hereby requested to participate in a research study conducted by Carmelita (Mack) Jacobs (MEdPsych), from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University as part of the requirements in completing a master's thesis in Educational Psychology.

Your child has been selected as a possible participant in this study because of his/her attendance at a school of skills.

Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please feel free to ask any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied and that you clearly understand what this research entails and what may be expected of you.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore the subjective beliefs and experiences of adolescents who have attended a school of skills. The focus will be on how they perceive their identity formation, in other words how they see themselves, others, the world, and their future. The role that the school of skills played in shaping that identity will also be explored. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this study will offer an insight into the invaluable worldview of the individual, and that it will inform parents, educators and counsellors to improve practices that lead to identity formation in adolescence.

## **2. PROCEDURES**

If you consent to participate in this study, I would request the following:

- Participation in a background information interview: Participant and parent(s) (45-60 minutes)

An initial meeting, if possible, with the family to introduce the study and answer any questions any family member may have.

- Participation in a personal interviews (45-60 minutes): Participants; more than one appointment may be necessary; arranged at a convenient time and venue. (Please note that interviews will be audio recorded, and then transcribed as raw data that will serve as the evidence in this study.)

## **3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Because your child will be required to share personal information, it may occur that he/she may or may not experience discomfort due to certain memories about their experiences. Counselling opportunities will be made available to your child should it become necessary during the course of the study. Please note that you and your child have the right to refuse any questions that may cause discomfort and that you and your child may refuse to participate in the study at any point.

In the case that a referral needs to be made to a psychologist, XXXXX, a psychologist practicing in the Bellville and Kraaifontein areas, agreed to avail herself. Contact details: XXXXX

## **4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

There are no expected benefits to participants, although it is hoped that the content of the interviews will inform the thoughts and understandings of parents, educators, counsellors and community members regarding contextual factors and their impact on the formation of one's identity. In this way educators and counsellors will be empowered to more effectively contribute to the development of a positive sense of identity in learners with whom they work.

## **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

No remuneration will be provided for the participation in the study.

## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be used to identify participants will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms. Furthermore, access to raw data containing identifying information will only be accessed by the researcher. Transcriptions of interviews as well as the video/audio recordings of

interviews will only be accessed by the researcher and securely stored after completion of the research study. No names of identifying information will be used in presenting the thesis.

## **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You may choose to participate in this study or not. If you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Furthermore, you may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher further reserves the right to ask the participant to withdraw from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## **8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher: Carmelita (Mack) Jacobs (...../ ..... or [carmelita.mack@gmail.com](mailto:carmelita.mack@gmail.com)) or Mrs L Collair (student supervisor at Stellenbosch University: 021 808 2304 or [lyncol@sun.ac.za](mailto:lyncol@sun.ac.za)).

## **9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You will have the right to listen to recordings of interviews and view transcribed information pertaining to your own interview. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché ([mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622) at the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University.

## **SIGNATURE OF PARENT(S) / GUARDIAN**

---

**(Father/Mother/Guardian)**

---

**(Father/Mother/Guardian)**



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### Parent consent form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby volunteer to take part in the research study: *Exploring identity formation in adolescents who have attended a school of skills*. The purpose of the study has been explained to me in English or it was satisfactorily translated to me; I understand that I will need to provide personal details, thoughts, experiences, feelings and memories about myself and my child.

I know that the researcher will tape record and keep notes of the interview sessions. I also know that all information, as well as my own, are kept secret. I have also given my permission that the notes and tape recordings may be discussed with the supervisor of the study. I also understand that my contributions will be respected by the researcher and the supervisor.

I have put my name on this paper to show that I agree to take part in the individual interviewing sessions.

Parent(s) / Guardian(s) name

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Declaration by researcher

I declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to .....
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above

Researcher's name

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix D

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### ***EXPLORING IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE ATTENDED A SCHOOL OF SKILLS***

#### **Interview guide for semi-structured interviews: Participants**

##### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- a) Introduce self
- b) Purpose of the interview
- c) Confidentiality and anonymity
- d) Format of the interview
- e) Negotiating the use of recording equipment
- f) Clarification and questions
- g) Obtain consent

##### **2. DEMOGRAPHIC INFO**

- a) Current age
- b) Years since being at a school of skills

*The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how you understand your identity (that is, how you see yourself).*

##### **3. GRAPHIC ELICITATION**

Provide participant with paper, pencil and eraser.

Instruction:

- a) *Draw a picture of how you see yourself, and add the things that you think are important in your life.*
- b) *Draw a timeline of your life. Include events and changes in your life and in the wider world that you think were important.*

##### **POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:**

- a) **HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?**
- b) How would you describe the things that formed how you see yourself?
- c) How does it make you feel to describe yourself in this way?
- d) **HOW DO YOU THINK OTHERS SEE YOU?**
- e) How do you think your family would describe you?  
How has this influenced the way you see yourself?
- f) How do you think your friends would describe you?

How has this influenced the way you see yourself?

- g) How do you think people in your community describe you?

How has this influenced the way you see yourself?

- h) DESCRIBE YOUR HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE.

- i) How do you feel now that you are out of school?

- j) How do you feel about where you are in your life right now?

#### 4. YOUR EXPERIENCE AT A SCHOOL OF SKILLS:

Referral to a school of skills:

- a) How old were you when you started at a school of skills?
- b) What were the reasons that you were referred to a school of skills?
- c) Who said you should go to a school of skills?
- d) Did you know what a school of skills was?
- e) What did you think a school of skills was?
- f) What did others say a school of skills is?
- g) How did you feel about having to attend a school of skills?
- h) What did you expect about attending a school of skills?
- i) Were your expectations the same or different from your experience?

Identifying with school of skills:

- j) How would you describe the teachers?
- k) How would you describe the other learners?
- l) Did you have a uniform? How did you feel about wearing that uniform? Were you proud to wear that uniform?
- m) Did you have many friends? What did you do together? What did you talk about? What did you do together after school?
- n) How were you involved at school? Did you take part in any extra-mural activities?

Positive and negative experiences:

- o) Describe a positive experience or relationship you had at the school of skills.
- p) Do you think that this experience/relationship influenced how you see yourself?  
Tell me more about that.
- q) Describe a negative experience/relationship you had at a school of skills.
- r) Do you think that this experience/relationship influenced how you see yourself?  
Tell me more.
- s) How have these experiences influenced how others see you?
- t) How have these experiences contributed to your hopes and dreams for the future?

Orientation and experience of work:

- u) Now that you look back, how do you feel about having gone to a school of skills?
- v) How would you have liked things to be different?

- w) Do you feel that attending a school of skills has prepared you for being an adult and has prepared you for the world of work?
- x) What are you doing now? What did you have to do to find this job / apply to study for this course, etc.?

#### Change and stability of Identity

- y) Has the way you see yourself changed since you left the school of skills?  
If so, how would you name or describe the things that contributed to how you see yourself today?
- z) Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for your time.

**EXPLORING IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE ATTENDED A SCHOOL OF SKILLS****Interview guide for semi-structured interview: Parents**

*Thank you for choosing to participate in this study.*

*The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how your child understands his/her identity.*

**1. PARTICIPANT'S IDENTITY:**

SELF:

- a) How do you think X understands his/her identity/ (that is ... sees himself/herself?)
- b) What experiences do you think contributed to shaping his/her identity?

OTHERS:

- c) How do you think others view X?
- d) How would you describe the influence this has on how X sees him/herself?

FUTURE PROSPECTS:

- a) How would you describe X's feelings about the future?
- b) How would you describe X's attitude towards future and his/her career opportunities?

**2. EXPERIENCE AT A SCHOOL OF SKILLS:**

- a) How would you describe X's experience at primary school?
- b) What were the reasons that X was placed at a school of skills?
- c) Who referred you, or suggested that X be placed at a school of skills?
- d) Was X formerly assessed before attending a school of skills?
- e) How did you feel about X attending a school of skills?
- f) How would you describe X's experience at a school of skills?  
How would you describe the influence these experiences have had on how X sees him/herself?
- g) How do you think X perceives others see him/her?  
How has these perceptions influenced the way X sees him/herself?
- h) What do others say about a school of skills?  
How do you think this has influenced the way X sees him/herself?
- i) How would you say attending a school of skills has influenced X's attitude about his/her future or career opportunities?
- j) What do you think could have/or has supported you as a parent in assisting X towards developing an identity and an attitude towards the future?

Thank you for your time.



## PARTICIPANT TRANSCRIPTION

Example of transcription four (T4) with participant four (Nick**)		Coding	Comments
Highlighted parts indicate units of meaning			
Researcher	Now you told me little bit about how you see yourself and what experiences you know added to that, but I also want to focus on the experiences at school of skills and how that impacted on how you see yourself and your feelings about the future. So how would you describe your experiences at a school of skills?		
Nick**	When I actually started there at that school I was like, what is this? I didn't really understand what's going on. Then the year went on and I was like, why do they call this a school of skills, there is nothing really wrong with them. When the year went on the next year and the people said like this is a school for dumb people and I don't understand what they really mean and like say ja it's like stupid children. I think it's about how the children act at the school. There is nothing wrong, they now have the people told them they are dumb so they gonna act dumb, do dumb things, throw each other with stones and things like that. They never actually wanted to act mature, they just wanted to stay there and that and with that they are now because they believed people told them that. And I started welding, I thought ok its new, one of my careers I'm doing now, because I actually looked there [where I am now] if they don't have motoring, but they didn't have and then I was ok, basic welding I can learn about that, and so I picked up some experience there [at the school of	2C   2C  3A 3A 3A   3A  3C	No prior knowledge of  what school of skills was  Not the school but how the children behaved

	skills].		
	<b>[Page 20]</b>		
	Now that I am at XXX I am picking up welding, but that wasn't actually my aim, was not going for that.		
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok, but you still manage to stick it out even though it's not your first choice?		
<b>Nick**</b>	Ja, I still manage.		<b>Perception that he learnt more from the skill than from academic subjects</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok, so when you first came there you didn't really know what it was about, why they called it a school of skills, so what did you learn from that after being there for three years?		
<b>Nick**</b>	I've learned not actually a lot because these like if you look at the subjects you don't get like your normal subjects at school, you get four subjects and just English subjects not like other schools mixed like English and Afrikaans, and what I pick up there was mostly like when I started there, like I will say you did like all your workshop classes but then you just went to one so you have pick up experience are small the other classes no you have one I did not see really why did that at first so ok then you choose what you want to do.	3C	<b>They had experience from different workshops and then in the end chose one to focus on</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok, so [...] you were exposed to all the different workshops and then you chose to be in welding?	3C	
<b>Nick**</b>	Yep.		
<b>Researcher</b>	And then you continued in that?		<b>Awareness of learning difficulties</b>
<b>Nick**</b>	Just went on.		
<b>Researcher</b>	And what were the reasons that you went to the school of skills?		
<b>Nick**</b>	Uhm when I was ... at my first primary school there it was like normal things but in my reading and writing wasn't actually as everyone's was, I mean my first year I failed	2B 2B	<b>Perceived difference between primary and SoS</b>

	<p>then I did over, came here to XXX, I started here in Grade 6 then I started here, everything was like different there, I was used to that environment, and then I came here it was like everything different, I didn't actually understand. Then I went to Grade 6 I went to Grade 7, I failed again and there is where everything started changing for me, I don't feel like going to school and things like that just wanted to leave that things and I came there by that school things started changing like I opened myself ... like I would like still be at home and mostly the children that wanted to finish and here I have that opportunity to finish school and pick-up an extra class.</p>	3C	Experience of failure lead to poor desire to attend school
		2B	"I started to open up"
		3C	Awareness that it is a special school
		3C	
		3C	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok, you say you didn't want to be at home like a lot of other children? Do you know people that dropped out of school?		Perception of the school having given him an opportunity
<b>Nick**</b>	Ja, some of my friends they dropped out of school like in Grade 3. One boy just stopped going to school because he failed twice Grade 3 and I don't want to be like them sitting at home because they still at home now where I had now the opportunity to go school like special school and look where that the skill took me.	2A	He believes that he is now at college because of his skill
		3C	
	[Page 21]		

## Appendix F

### PARENT TRANSCRIPTION

Example of transcription four (T4) with parent four (PNick**) Highlighted parts indicate units of meaning		Coding	Comments
<b>Researcher</b>	If one thinks in terms of his home life growing up with his parents, primary school, school of skills, can you maybe think of an experience or a few experiences that contributed to how he sees himself today?		
<b>PNick</b>	I think how he sees himself today is mostly about his upbringing at home, because we are strict parents, uhm and maybe also if we didn't had that discipline on his life he would have turn maybe out totally different because the friends that he had some of them are on tik, drinking, where he is totally not into that uhm, friends that he have now at the moment are in matric and they are descent boys so I think if he didn't had like a good upbringing if we also weren't parents that were strict on him then he would not have been the child or the boy that he is today, uhm although sometimes he doesn't, he always showed respect towards me but although sometimes he doesn't show respect towards his father not being like rude you know that kind of thing but I suppose all youngster teenagers go through that, but that's why I said I think we played a big role as parents in his life and then also uhm I can't actually say his primary school because uhm I didn't have any joy out of the the teachers at his primary school because they were just not supportive at all, if it wasn't for us that saw the problem	1AA  1AA  1AA  1AA  1AA  1AA  2B 2B 2B	Influence of parents and upbringing

<p>that he had then we would have never actually sent him to the school of skills, but because I've noticed that there is something wrong uhm specially where the reading and the writing were concern, so I can actually say thank you for the school of skills. there I think the teachers played a big role than at his primary school, uhm there is one specific teacher but I can't get to her name that I actually know that really was an encouragement to him and I think there was another one but I think she went overseas, she was a XXX teacher, ja those two teachers that I know that really use to encourage him a lot, not to whatever he was maybe feeling a little bit despondent or I don't wanted to go to school or whatever but they played a role in his life that school, but primary school ...</p> <p>[page 2]</p>	<p><b>2B</b></p> <p><b>3C</b></p> <p><b>3BA</b></p> <p><b>3BA</b></p> <p><b>3BA</b></p> <p><b>3BA</b></p>	
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## Appendix G

### RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Example of researcher's notes four (R4) following interviews Nick and PNick	Coding
<p><b>Date, time, and place of observation</b></p> <p>6 July 2013</p> <p>11:05-13:00</p> <p>Home of Nick and PNick</p> <p>Area XXX</p> <p>Father: Unemployed; however, he does bring in income through doing casual jobs</p> <p>Mother: Full-time employment, work environment described as very stressful</p> <p>Family composition: Mother, father, two brothers and a sister</p>	
<p><b>Line notes:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Felt that I was able to probe better during this interview in comparison with the other interviews. Perhaps my interviewing skills are improving.</li> <li>2. The way Nick related how he has learnt to deal with his <b>temper problems to Eminem's</b> music was interesting. It relates to the literature, which shows that celebrities and popular icons have a huge impact on teenagers today.</li> <li>3. Dealing with <b>anger and emotions</b> seems to be part of the identity-formation process.</li> <li>4. And indicative of his sense of identity.</li> <li>5. Of my participants, three were really <b>grateful for their experiences</b> at a school of skills.</li> <li>6. It seems that they received <b>more attention, better support and encouragement.</b></li> <li>7. It seems that the <b>teachers who they perceived as being caring and encouraging</b> also honed their leadership skills.</li> <li>8. <b>Jack</b> seems to have had a very different experience.</li> <li>9. Maybe because of personality.</li> <li>10. But also due to this experiences.</li> <li>11. Or maybe he should not have gone to school of skills at all.</li> </ol>	<p><b>1AA</b></p> <p><b>1AA</b></p> <p><b>3C</b></p> <p><b>3BA</b></p>

12. Maybe a mainstream would have suited his needs better.	
13. Seems he wanted to pursue an academic route.	
14. While Nick was clear on wanting to work with this hands, especially cars.	1AA
15. The influence of parents also appears to play a big role.	1AA
16. Both Nick and his mother indicated that they believe that the influence of his upbringing contributed to how he sees himself today, especially in the light of decisions he has made.	1AA
17. For example, Nick's mom pointed out how he stopped being friends with those who started drinking and smoking.	2B
18. Parents emotional and sense of shame in learning that their child has reading difficulties.	
19. PRosie expressed similar feelings.	1AA
20. Nick appears to have a very strong character.	
21. Parents reported trusting him more and he describes himself as being a role model to his friends at the school of skills.	1AA
22. In comparison to the other participants, Nick is similarly confident about himself and feels positive about his aspirations for the future, yet he seems to be more engaged in actively working towards his goals, which the literature says is necessary for healthy identity formation.	1AA
	1AB

## Appendix H

### CODING AND THEMES

Categories	Themes and sub-themes
<b>1.</b>  Participants' perceptions of their sense of self	<b>1A:</b> Individual sense of self:  <b>1AA:</b> Personality, roles and values <b>1AB:</b> Feelings about the future  <b>1B:</b> Perception of being 'normal'  <b>1C:</b> Gender differences in identity formation
<b>2.</b>  Participants' perceptions of experiences that impacted on their sense of identity	<b>2A:</b> Self-defining memories  <b>2B:</b> Primary school experiences  <b>2C:</b> Referral to a school of skills
<b>3.</b>  Participants' perceptions of the role of the school context in shaping their sense of identity	<b>3A:</b> Public forms of evaluation  <b>3B:</b> Quality of interpersonal experiences with  <b>3BA:</b> Teachers <b>3BB:</b> Peers  <b>3C:</b> School-related sense of self  <b>3D:</b> Concerns about vocational possibilities